

3 1761 03929 2669



Presented to the
LIBRARY of the
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

by

JOSEPH BUIST







HISTORY

OF THE

SECESSION CHURCH.



James Cunningham
London } HISTORY
1889

OF THE

SECESSION CHURCH.

BY THE

REV. JOHN M'KERROW,

BRIDGE OF TEITH.

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH:

WILLIAM OLIPHANT AND SON, PUBLISHERS,

7, SOUTH BRIDGE STREET.

MDCCCXXXIX.



EDINBURGH : W. OLIPHANT, JUN. AND CO., PRINTERS, SOUTH BRIDGE STREET.

PREFACE.

IN presenting this work to the public, the Author claims for it no merit except that of being a faithful record of the proceedings of that church whose history it professes to give. While the information which it contains will be chiefly valuable to the members of the Secession Church, there will be found embodied in it a variety of facts connected with the religious history of our country, which he flatters himself will not be altogether uninteresting to the general reader.

The Author has had unrestricted access, during the course of his labours, to the official records of the Secession Church; and, in giving an account of the proceedings of that church, he is not aware that he has made any statement which these records will not be found to verify. In noticing the transactions of other churches, he has had recourse to official documents, wherever he could find them; and, in the absence of these documents, he has gleaned his information from pamphlets which were published during the progress of the events that are detailed, and by individuals who had good opportunities of being acquainted with these events, on account of their be-

ing the chief actors in them. A manuscript, containing some account of the Secession, during the first years of its existence, which Professor Brown of Haddington had commenced, but did not think proper to complete, was placed by the Professor's son, the late Rev. John Brown of Whitburn, at the Author's disposal; and to this manuscript he acknowledges himself indebted for several of the facts which he has stated concerning the early history of the Secession.

It is possible that, amid such a mass of facts and opinions, as are detailed in these volumes, many of which are placed on record for the first time, there may be some things that are incorrectly stated. The Author would consider himself guilty of presumption, were he to aver that, in recording what to him appeared to be matters of fact, he has committed no mistake. While he solicits from his readers credit for honesty of purpose, he puts in no claim to infallibility. He is not aware, however, that he has, in a single instance, been guilty of wilful misrepresentation, or that he has attempted to give a false colouring to particular events. Should any misstatement of facts be pointed out to him, either by friend or foe, he will gladly avail himself of the suggestion, and will take the first opportunity of correcting the mistake.

With regard to the *opinions* which he has expressed, concerning men and measures, these are his own. He holds himself responsible for them. He has ventured to give utterance to them, because he thinks they are right. He is willing, however, to retract or modify them, should any one convince him that they are wrong. He has no wish pertinaciously to adhere

to any opinion, merely because he has once avowed it. He is willing to embrace truth, from whatever quarter it may come.

The Author is not so unreasonable as to expect that these volumes will please all parties. In the present divided state of public opinion, concerning the great questions which are agitating the country, different views will be entertained by different individuals; and according as these views coincide with those which are expressed in this work, will the Author be approved of, or condemned. Some will find fault with him because he has spoken too plainly. Others will grumble, because he has not spoken plain enough: while there may be others, who, without having any particular fault to find with the Author himself, may make use of his production as a medium, through which to assail that religious party whom, in the present instance, he represents, and whom they consider it their duty to oppose on all occasions and by all means. In preparing this work for the press, the Author has counted the cost of these things. All that he asks is, candid and honourable treatment.

To those of his brethren, who returned answers to his circular concerning the statistics of the Secession, the Author tenders his grateful acknowledgments. He has been much encouraged in his labours, by the kind wishes which many of them have expressed for the success of his undertaking; and should the work, which he now submits to their perusal, be deemed by them worthy of their approbation, he will consider himself amply repaid for the trouble which he has undergone in the preparation of it. He has only

further to add, that the volumes have been composed at brief intervals of leisure, which have occurred, amid the almost incessant demands made upon his time and attention by the multifarious duties connected with the pastoral charge of a congregation scattered over an extensive district of country. He mentions this circumstance to account for the delay which has taken place in the publication, and also to bespeak the indulgence of his good-natured readers, should they now and then discover, in the course of the work, a repetition of the same sentiment, or a want of proper continuity in any part of the narrative.

In concluding this prefatory notice, the Author expresses his earnest desire that the History of the Secession, which is now submitted to the judgment of the public, may be rendered subservient to the extension of Christ's spiritual kingdom in the world; and that it may be instrumental in perpetuating to distant ages those benefits, which the inhabitants of our own and other lands have already derived from the existence of the Secession Church.

BRIDGE OF TEITH, *9th May*, 1839.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE.

Proceedings of the Scottish Parliament. First General Assembly after the Revolution. Imposition of oaths. Cameronians. Mr John Hepburn. First process against Professor Simson. Condemnation of the Auchterarder Creed. The Marrow Controversy. Second process against Professor Simson. Discussions concerning the Law of Patronage. Refusal of the Assembly to record dissents. Ecclesiastical despotism, 1-47

PART I.

FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECESSION, TILL
THE DIVISION OCCASIONED BY THE CONTROVERSY
ABOUT THE BURGESS OATH.

CHAPTER I.

Overture concerning the Jus Devolutum. Passed into a Law. Mr Ebenczer Erskine and other brethren protest against it. Their protest refused. Representations of ministers and elders, and of 1700 persons rejected. Violent settlement at Kinross. Mr Ebenczer Erskine's Synod Sermon at Perth. Charges founded on it. Mr Erskine found censurable, but refuses to submit to censure. Twelve ministers and two elders protest against the decision of Synod. Mr Erskine and Mr Fisher protest and appeal to the General Assembly. Proceedings of the General Assembly. Sentence of

Synod affirmed. Mr Erskine rebuked and admonished. Protestation by Messrs Erskine, Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher. The four brethren appointed to appear before the Commission. Proceedings of the Commission. The four brethren suspended from the exercise of their ministry, and their pastoral relation loosed. Mr Gabriel Wilson and six other ministers protest against this decision. Protestation of the four brethren. Vindication of the Fathers of the Secession, 49-91

CHAPTER II.

The four brethren meet at Gairney Bridge. The Associate Presbytery formed. First Testimony published. Articles of belief published by the Presbytery. Popularity of the Seceding ministers. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1734. Act authorising the restoration of the four brethren to their charges. Meeting of the synod of Perth and Stirling in July 1734. The sentence pronounced by the Commission against the four brethren reversed. The brethren refuse to return to the national church. Meeting of the General Assembly in 1735. The Associate Presbytery agree to proceed to acts of jurisdiction. Applications for sermon made from the parishes of Muckhart and Kinross. Confession of sin made by the brethren of the Presbytery to one another. General Assembly of 1736. Professor Campbell of St Andrew's convicted of error, but no censure inflicted. Messrs Wilson and Fisher visit the west of Scotland. Introduction of the Secession into Ireland. Mr Wilson elected Professor of Divinity. Publication of the Judicial Testimony. Porteous riot. Porteous act condemned by the Seceding ministers, 92-143

CHAPTER III.

Accession of Messrs Thomas Mair and Ralph Erskine to the Associate Presbytery. Adherents of the Secession form themselves into societies for prayer and religious conference. Questions proposed to the Presbytery concerning terms of communion. Lesly and his adherents excommunicated. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1737. Contentings of the people at Denny. Violent settlement at Muckhart. Act of the Associate Presbytery asserting the right of popular election. Numerous petitions presented for a supply of sermon. The Presbytery resolve to licence young men. For-

mula of questions adopted. Messrs Hunter and Clarkson entered on trials for licence. Their declaration concerning the civil magistrate. Mr Hunter licensed. The General Assembly alarmed at the rapid progress of the Secession. A libel put into the hands of the Seceding brethren. The Presbytery publish the libel, with answers. Resolve to appear at the bar of the Assembly. An act of declinature prepared. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1739. The act of declinature read at the bar of the Assembly, by the moderator of the Presbytery. Overture concerning the Seceding brethren adopted by the Assembly. Sentence of deposition pronounced. Conduct of the magistrates toward the Seceding ministers, after their deposition. The church doors closed against Mr E. Erskine and Mr Wilson. These brethren preach in the open air. Interesting scenes, 144-182

CHAPTER IV.

The breach between the Secession and the Establishment rendered irreparable. Riotous opposition made to the Secession. Pamphlets written against the Secession. Mr Wilson of Perth writes a "Defence." Anecdote. Mr Gavin Beugo and Mr James Mair, probationers, join the Associate Presbytery. Ordination of Mr John Hunter. His death. Anecdote of Principal Robertson. Reply of a Seceder to a member of the Establishment. Licentiates of the Presbytery. Recommendation by the Presbytery to their adherents. Act passed by the Presbytery concerning public fasts. Appearance of Mr George Whitefield. His great labours and popularity. Invited by the Seceders to come to Scotland. Correspondence between Mr Whitefield and the Messrs Erskine. His conference with the Associate Presbytery. Unsatisfactory issue of the conference. Unhappy results. Death of the Rev. Mr Wilson. Mr Moncrieff appointed Professor of Divinity. Mr Whitefield's second visit to Scotland. Extraordinary work at Cambuslang. Controversy concerning it. A fast appointed on account of it, by the Associate Presbytery, 183-222

CHAPTER V.

No lay elders in the Associate Presbytery for four years. The sessions of Kinclaven and Abernethy give in the first accessions.

Thomas Watson and George Dron the first elders that were enrolled. Form of accession. Anomaly connected with the session of Perth. Petition from the congregation of Kinross for one of their elders to act as a member of Presbytery. Unusual modes of procedure in the Presbytery. Fund for the support of students of divinity. Philosophical class instituted. Mr Robert Archibald appointed to take charge of it. Succeeded by Mr David Wilson. Rev. Andrew Arrot of Dunnichen accedes to the Presbytery. The Presbytery send a preacher to Ireland. A petition from Pennsylvania for sermon. The Presbytery publish an Act concerning the Doctrine of Grace. The Presbytery resolve to renew the covenants. A Bond and Acknowledgment of Sins prepared. Mr Nairn dissents. Mr Nairn renounces his connexion with the Presbytery. Presbytery's Answers to Mr Nairn's Reasons of Dissent. The Presbytery engage in covenanting at Stirling. Covenanting declared to be the term of communion. The ceremony of covenanting described. The Presbytery constitute themselves into a Synod. First meeting of Synod held at Stirling in March 1745. A second mission undertaken to Ireland. The Secession introduced into London. Loyalty of the Seceders during the Rebellion in 1745. Church discipline inflicted on two Seceders for sinful compliance with the rebels, 223-269

CHAPTER VI.

Burgess Oath controversy. Reasons why it ought not to be silently passed over. Overture concerning the burgess oath. Religious clause in the burgess oath. Keen debates in the Synod. Mr Adam Gib's opinion. Mr Archibald Hall's opinion. Motion made concerning the religious clause. Counter-motion for delay carried. Mr Gib dissents. Meeting of Synod in September 1745. A motion for delay carried. A meeting of Synod in November. The business again delayed. Meeting of Synod in April 1746. Full attendance of ministers and elders. Several healing measures proposed, but rejected. Motion *against* the religious clause carried. Mr Ralph Erskine and several others protest. Meeting of Synod in September. Motion concerning making the former decision a term of communion. Protest against the putting of this motion. Stormy debates. A motion for delay carried. Sixteen members protest. Mr Ebenezer Erskine's declaration. Meeting of Synod in April 1747. A great interest excited. Discussions concerning the state-

ment of the vote. Mr Gib's protest. A vote stated concerning the decision of Synod in April 1746. Mr Moncrieff's protestation. The question concerning said decision put to the vote, and carried in the affirmative. Mr Thomas Mair's declaration. Disruption of the Synod. A number of the brethren meet in Mr Gib's house. Claim the authority of the Associate Synod. Resolutions adopted by them. Condemnatory acts. Questions added to the Formula. Burgher and Antiburgher designations. Proceedings of the Burgher brethren. Letter to Mr Thomas Mair and Mr Gib. Answers of these brethren. Burgher Synod meets at Dunfermline. Act of Nullity passed by them. Applications to them for sermon. *Pro re nata* meeting at Falkirk. Letter sent to the Antiburgher brethren. Meeting of the Antiburgher Synod. Resolve to libel the Burgher brethren. Mr Hutton appears before the Synod, and is deposed. Sentence of deposition and excommunication pronounced upon all the Burgher brethren. Privy censures in the Antiburgher Synod. Reflections on the breach, . 270-310

PART II.

HISTORY OF THE SECESSION FROM THE BREACH IN THE SYNOD TILL THE PERIOD OF THE REUNION.

HISTORY OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATE (OR ANTIBURGHER) SYNOD.

CHAPTER VII.

State of affairs in the Scottish Church. Increased power of the moderate party. "Riding committees" abolished. Presbytery of Linlithgow prove contumacious. Presbytery of Dunfermline refuse to ordain Mr Richardson. Case of Mr Gillespie of Carnock. Application by the General Assembly for an increase in their "livings," opposed by the Scottish counties, and rejected by government. Constitution of the Synod in Mr Gib's house. Proceedings against Mr Nairn. Mr Nairn deposed and excommunicated. Mr Nairn returns to the national church. Questions of casuistry submitted to the Synod. Advice given concerning the payment of taxes for the support of the Episcopal Church. Application from Pennsylvania for sermon. Missionaries sent to America. Philosophical class at Abernethy. Act of the Synod concerning Arminianism. Mr Thomas Mair objects to some of the ar-

ticles in it, and is charged with holding erroneous opinions. Mr Mair suspended from the exercise of his ministry. Solemn warning published by the Synod. Proposal to address the King on the state of religion. Proposal rejected. Overture to present a congratulatory address to George III. at his accession, laid aside. Death of Mr Alexander Moncrieff. His son Mr William Moncrieff elected Professor of Divinity. Missionary spirit of the Synod. Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, makes application to the Synod for assistance in evangelizing the North American Indians. Fund for support of widows. Liberality of the Synod's congregations, 312-359

CHAPTER VIII.

State of matters in the national church. Formation of the Relief Presbytery. Continued prosperity of the Secession. Mr Robert Carmichael accused of heresy. Is deposed and excommunicated. Mr Laurence Wotherspoon's essay. Declared heretical. He is rebuked and suspended. Expresses his penitence. Sentence of suspension removed. Case of Mr Andrew Marshall, student. Mr Alexander Pirie, teacher of the Philosophical Class, accused of recommending heterodox books to the students. Deprived of his licence and excommunicated. Overture about preaching. Watchfulness of the Synod over the students. Philosophical Class. Examinations. Mr Thomas Mair makes unsuccessful application to be restored. Overture about probationers and ministers preaching in vacant congregations. American missions. Preachers averse to go. Mr Mason settled in New York. Death of Mr Gellatly. Pennsylvanian presbytery. Coalition of the Burgher and Antiburgher missionaries in America, disapproved of by the Synod. Mr David Telfar's letter to the Synod. Unfavourably received. Mr Gib's overture about the Secession Testimony. Consideration of it delayed. Mr Gib protests. Absents himself from the meetings of Synod. Reads a paper in explanation of his conduct. Mr Gib's overture rejected. Mr Gib dissents. Overture about the support of widows and children of deceased ministers. Regulations of the public fund. Secession preachers sent to Caithness. Preach to the Highlanders. Encouragement given to Gaelic students. Recommendation given to congregations concerning ministers' stipends. Penal statutes against Roman Catholics repealed. Synod testify against the repeal. New York presbytery formed. Synod refuse to acknowledge it. Dealings with Mr Gib. His overture adopted. Regulations about students of divinity, 360-410

CHAPTER IX.

Dr Robertson's policy in the General Assembly. Deplorable effects of it. Scenes of strife in the church courts. Forced induction of Mr Thomson into the parish of St Ninians. Violent settlements at Kirk of Shotts and at Eaglesham. The Smytonite controversy. Diversity of opinion about lifting the bread at the ordinance of the Supper. Mr Smyton insists upon uniformity. The matter brought before the Synod. The Synod recommend forbearance. Mr Smyton proves contumacious. Is suspended from the exercise of his ministry. Resolutions of Synod upon the subject. Meetings held about a union between the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods. Petitions from the Irish presbyteries on the subject. Conduct of the presbyteries disapproved of by the Synod. The Irish brethren send up a representation and complaint to the Synod. Philosophical class removed to Edinburgh. Union in America betwixt the Burgher and Antiburgher brethren and Reformed Presbytery. Condemned by the Synod. Two of the American brethren refuse to coalesce. The Synod recognise them as the presbytery of Pennsylvania, and send a missionary to them. Petition from the congregation of Pictou in Nova Scotia. Mr James D. Macgregor sent to labour among them. Death of Mr William Moncrieff. Mr Archibald Bruce elected Professor of Divinity. Proposal to have a General Synod, with four provincial synods. Proposal adopted. Regulations concerning preachers. Declaration respecting the slave trade. Celebration of the centenary of the Revolution, 411-448



HISTORY

OF THE

SECESSION CHURCH.

INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE.

Proceedings of the Scottish Parliament. First General Assembly after the Revolution. Imposition of oaths. Cameronians. Mr John Hepburn. First process against Professor Simson. Condemnation of the Auchterarder Creed. The Marrow Controversy. Second process against Professor Simson. Law of Patronage. Discussions concerning it. Refusal of the Assembly to record dissents. Ecclesiastical despotism.

To trace the rise and progress, to describe the present state, and to dwell upon the future prospects of the SECESSION CHURCH, are the objects which I propose in the present work. Since the memorable era of the Reformation, no event has taken place in our country which has been productive of such important consequences, in a religious point of view, as that which forms the subject of the present narrative. The effects, which have followed from it, have been far more extensive, and in every respect more important, than could possibly have been anticipated by the venerable men, with whom the Secession originated, or by that church from which they felt themselves under the necessity of withdrawing. Before proceeding to detail the particulars of this memorable event, and the consequences that have resulted from it, I shall carry my readers backward to the beginning of the

eighteenth century, and shall present them with a rapid glance of some of those circumstances connected with the state of the Scottish Church, immediately after the Revolution, which tended to alienate the minds of a large portion of the people from the ecclesiastical establishment of the country; and which, operating as so many predisposing causes, paved the way for a rapid, as well as an extensive revolt, so soon as the banner of the Secession was unfurled.

The first Scottish Parliament that met after the Revolution, declared prelacy to be “a great and insupportable grievance to this nation, and contrary to the inclination of the generality of the people ever since the Reformation;” and they forthwith abolished the same. In the second session of the same parliament, which met in 1690, the presbyterian form of church government was re-established, according to the ratification and establishment, which had been given to it in 1592. This first act of the Scottish Parliament, in reference to the national church, was very unpalatable to many, and was condemned by them on the following grounds:—that it did not recognise what God had done for the Scottish Church during one of the brightest periods of her history, viz. that which elapsed from 1638 to 1650—that it did not formally condemn and disannul the Act Recissory passed (1661) during the first parliament of Charles II.—and that it did not in express terms declare prelacy to be contrary to the word of God, and abjured by the national covenants. That the act should adopt, as its basis, for the re-establishment of the presbyterian government, what had been done in 1592, rather than what had been accomplished in 1638 and subsequent years, was considered as a decidedly retrograde movement in the work of reformation. Another unpopular act passed by this parliament was that which enjoined the oath of allegiance to be sworn “in place of any other oaths imposed by laws and acts of preceding parliaments.” Though this act appeared to be framed with a view to the abolition of those oaths, which had been imposed during the period of the persecution,

yet it was so worded as to include amongst the number of the oaths that were abolished, the oath of the covenant—and was obviously designed to open the door of admission to all classes of his majesty's subjects, into places of trust and power, whether they were favourers of the covenant or not. The passing of such an act could not but give grievous offence to all those (and the number was not small) who considered the covenant as the grand palladium of the liberties of their country. The disappointment, occasioned by the adopting of this measure, was the more severely felt, that the same parliament, which sanctioned it, laid aside the draught of an act, after it had been twice read, which had been introduced avowedly for the purpose of excluding from places of public trust all who had taken any share in the oppressive measures of the bygone period.

The proceedings of the first General Assembly, held after the Revolution, appear in some respects not to have been more satisfactory, than those of the parliament, to a considerable portion of the presbyterians. This Assembly, after a suspension of its meetings for more than thirty years, sat down upon the 16th of October 1690. Of the old presbyterian ministers, who had been ejected at the Restoration, not more than sixty were now alive;* and these men—who had themselves suffered so much for conscience sake—rejoicing that their favourite form of church government was again restored, and influenced by an amiable and forgiving spirit, showed a much greater disposition to conciliate the episcopal clergy than to retaliate upon them the wrongs which they had received. The following declaration, made by their moderator (Mr Hugh Kennedy) they adopted, and entered upon their record, “That it was not the mind of the Assembly to depose any incumbent simply for his judgment anent the government of the church, or to urge re-ordination upon any incumbent whatsoever:” And in accordance with this declaration were the instructions which they gave to their Commission, “That they be very cautious of receiv-

* Appendix to Sir Henry Moncrieff Welwood's Life of Erskine, p. 420.

ing informations against the late conformists ; and that they proceed in the matter of censure very deliberately, so as none may have just cause to complain of their rigidity ; and that they shall not proceed to censure but upon relevant libels and sufficient probation.” Three ministers, viz. Messrs. Shields, Linning, and Boyd—who had previously belonged to the Society-men, or Cameronians, but who at this meeting had been received into the bosom of the church—gave in a paper enumerating certain grievances, connected with the defections of the past and present times, which they wished the Assembly to redress. The consideration of this paper was referred to the committee of overtures, who, when they gave in their report, characterised it as containing “ unseasonable and impracticable proposals, uncharitable and injurious reflections, tending rather to kindle contentions than to compose divisions.”*

This spirit of lenity, which influenced the members of the present Assembly, and which disposed them in a great measure to overlook, if not altogether to bury in oblivion, the delinquencies with which many of the conforming clergy had been chargeable, displayed itself no less in the proceedings of some of the subsequent Assemblies : For in 1694, among other charges which the commission received from the Assembly, they were enjoined “ to receive into ministerial communion such of the late conform ministers, as, having qualified themselves according to law, shall subscribe the Formula :” And that no violence might be done to their consciences by subscribing a presbyterian formula, it was so framed that it did not require them to acknowledge that presbyterian government is founded on the word of God, but only, “ That the church government, as now settled by law, is the only government of this church.” By such measures as these, a wide door of admission into the national church was opened to men who had hitherto thrown all their influence into the scale of arbitrary power, and who, by the active part which they had taken in the persecutions carried on during the preceding reigns, had rendered themselves

* Act 5th Assembly 1690.

exceedingly odious in the eyes of the people. Not a few availed themselves of the opportunity, which was thus presented, of keeping possession, upon such easy terms, of their livings: they abjured prelacy, at least in form, and became the avowed adherents of a system of church polity, which it had been the unremitting object of their past lives to extirpate. That the number of ministers received into the Establishment, in consequence of these measures, was not small, we learn from the following passage in an address presented by the commission to Queen Anne; “ We cannot but lay before your Majesty this pregnant instance of our moderation, that, since our late happy establishment, there have been taken in, and continued, hundreds of dissenting (*i. e.* episcopal) ministers upon the easiest terms.”* By the too easy admission of such men† into the Church of Scotland, immediately after the Revolution, an injury was done to her character at the very outset, from which she did not speedily recover; and the groundwork was thus laid of that system of coercion and of mal-administration which drove, at no distant period, from her communion, multitudes of the best of her members.

By such proceedings the Assembly subjected themselves to the charge of being too compliant with the wishes of those who were in power—of being favourers of erastianism—of renouncing their covenant engagements—and of causing the work of reformation, so auspiciously begun by their forefathers, to retrograde instead of advance. What was expected of them was, that they would have taken, as their model, the Assembly which met in 1638—that, like the

* Act 10th Assembly, 1712.

† For a description of the characters of the men who were thus received into the church on such easy terms, I refer the reader to Burnet’s History of his own times. That Prelate says of them, “ They were generally very mean and despicable in all respects. They were the worst preachers I ever heard. They were ignorant to a reproach. Many of them were openly vicious. They were a disgrace to their orders, and the sacred functions, and were indeed the dregs and refuse of the northern parts.”—*Burnet*, vol. i. p. 153, folio edition.

nobles and ministers of that reforming period, they would have asserted their independence as a spiritual court, and protested in decided terms against every attempt on the part of those in power to interfere with or control their proceedings—that they would have sisted at their bar, and deposed and excommunicated the bishops and others who had been the ringleaders in the past defections—and that they would at least have made the attempt to restore to their former ascendancy throughout the country, the covenants, which for some time past, had been kept very much in the back ground. The reason assigned by their apologists, why such a course was not pursued by them, was, that they did not wish to run the risk, by taking too high ground, of involving the country in fresh troubles, and of weakening the hands of the new government to which they felt themselves so deeply indebted. Others, again, considered their not adopting such measures as a sure evidence of their indifference to the cause of God.

Another source of division, both amongst ministers and people, was the imposition of certain oaths by the government. The imposition of such oaths, as a qualification to sit in church courts, was considered by many as an unwarrantable encroachment upon the freedom of the christian church, and as at variance with their Confession of Faith. Influenced by such conscientious scruples, not a few of the ministers refused to take the oaths. The ferment upon this subject rose to its greatest height, toward the latter end of the reign of Queen Anne, when the oath of abjuration, which had previously been imposed on persons occupying places of civil trust, was enjoined to be taken by all ministers, whether belonging to the establishment or to dissenters. This oath was peculiarly offensive to the presbyterian clergy, on account of its reduplicating upon an act passed for settling the succession to the crown; which act required, that the person succeeding to the crown shall be of the communion of the Church of England; and shall maintain the English hierarchy as established by law. The oath of abjuration required the

persons swearing it to maintain the succession *as limited* by this act ; which clause was interpreted by the presbyterians as extending not only to the persons and families, that were to succeed to the crown, but also to the conditions upon which the crown was to be held by them : and they considered it hard to be obliged to take an oath which, as to the spirit of it, was completely opposed to the oath of their covenants ; the one oath requiring them to sanction a clause which expressly provided that the person occupying the throne shall be an episcopalian, and the other oath as expressly binding them to recognise no form of church government, either in king or subjects, except that of presbytery. Another objection to the oath was, that it contained in it certain equivocal expressions, which were interpreted by some as implying in them a recognition of the queen's supremacy in matters of religion : and, in addition to all this, the person taking the oath was obliged to swear that he took it heartily and cheerfully. Entertaining such views of the oath, and considering that it required from them an abandonment of principles which they had hitherto held sacred, many of the ministers positively refused to take it, and were prepared to surrender their livings rather than act in opposition to the dictates of their conscience. All, however, were not animated by the same spirit. A considerable class, consisting chiefly of those who for the sake of their livings had renounced episcopacy and connected themselves with the Established Church, were not so scrupulous about taking the oath. After some explanation of the doubtful clauses, by way of salvo to their conscience (and some of them did not even require this) they consented to take it. This diversity of sentiment amongst the ministers, produced a corresponding division among the people. The popular current ran in favour of those ministers who had shown their independence by refusing to take the oath. Many serious persons refused to hear, or to give any countenance to the ministrations of those who had yielded what they deemed a sinful compliance in this matter ; and so high did the party

feeling, engendered by this question, run, that the people would scarcely attend any sacramental occasion where such ministers were employed. This popular feeling was to a certain extent cherished by the ministers of the one class refusing, in many instances, to hold communion with those of the other.* It ought to be recorded to the praise of Queen Anne's government, that they respected the conscientious scruples of the non-jurants, inasmuch as no molestation of any kind was given to those who refused to take the oath; and the Assembly, when they met, did all in their power to prevent the injurious effects which such a division threatened to produce within the church: they enjoined the ministers to exercise mutual forbearance, and to cultivate love and charity toward one another.†

Besides this division amongst both ministers and people, occasioned by the swearing of the abjuration oath, there existed at this time—chiefly in the west and southern parts of Scotland—a class of dissenters, known by the name of Society-men, or Cameronians. These were the descendants of that party of the Covenanters, who carried their principles to their utmost length. They refused to join the communion of the Established Church, on account of its erastianism; and they professed to withdraw their subjection from the State, on account of its recognising a king and parliament who had not subscribed the covenants. At the head of this party was Mr John Macmillan, minister of the gospel at Balmaghie. The Assembly commenced a process against him in 1704, and at length deposed him, on account of his anti-government principles, and on account of, what they deemed, certain irregularities connected with the exercise of his ministry. He submitted for some time to this sentence; but finding that he was not likely soon to be restored, he resumed his office, of his own accord, and continued preaching

* Brown's MS.

† The oath was afterward modified in such a manner that the greater part of those who at first refused were brought to take it,—though some still continued to hold out against it.

for a number of years ; and though the principles which he and his party professed to hold, were such as, when carried to their utmost extent, could not be acted upon in the present state of society, yet there is reason to believe that his labours were useful to many in those wild and uncultivated districts, where he chiefly itinerated.

There was another party who, as to religious opinion, occupied a middle station betwixt the Establishment and the followers of Mr Macmillan. Conscientious scruples kept them from adhering to the former ; and they were not sufficiently rigid in their sentiments to be admitted to the communion of the latter. The national church, according as it had been re-established at the Revolution, they considered as too erastian in its constitution. What they wanted was, that it should be altogether independent of any interference on the part of the State ; that, in the holding of its assemblies, and in the management of its affairs, it should recognize no authority but that of the King of Zion. They objected to it on the ground of its being too much secularized, and of its not having carried the work of reformation to a sufficient length. At the same time, they did not (like the Society-men) carry their views so far as to disown, in civil matters, the authority of the ruling powers, on the ground that they had not covenanted. Mr John Hepburn, minister of Urr, was for many years the head of this party. Any brief notices that have been transmitted to us of the history of this person, lead us to believe that he was a good man, full of zeal for his Master's service, and animated by the spirit of an apostle. The treatment which he received from the General Assembly, tended to spread the spirit of disaffection among the people. He was first suspended, and then deposed from the office of the ministry ; and though the breach was at one time in a fair way of being healed, by the Commission, that met in 1707, agreeing to restore him, yet the Assembly of the following year refused to sanction this deed of their Commission. Mr Hepburn continued to preach after this for a number of years ; and the party that adhered

to him was considerable, amongst whom were some of the most serious persons in that part of the country where he laboured.

A train of events, which followed one another in rapid succession, excited a great ferment among the friends of the Scottish Church, and fairly marshalled upon opposite sides the leading men of her communion. The issue of some important causes, brought under the review of her judicatories, made it but too manifest that a spirit of error, or at least, of indifference to the truth, had pervaded her high places. Arminian and pelagian sentiments met with defenders among her ministers, and the propagators of these tenets were most leniently dealt with ; they were all but applauded, while the severest lash of ecclesiastical discipline was applied to those good men, who had the honesty and the courage to stand boldly forward and defend the insulted doctrines of free grace.

Mr James Webster, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, having, in 1714, called the attention of the Assembly to certain reports, which were circulated concerning the teaching of error by Mr John Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, and considering that it was the duty of the Assembly to take cognizance of such matters, requested that they would institute an inquiry into the truth of these reports. This they declined doing ; but appointed Mr Webster, and all who might join along with him, to present a complaint against Mr Simson, before the Presbytery of Glasgow, upon their own responsibility ; at the same time intimating that all who did so would be held as libellers. Mr Webster, accordingly, did libel Mr Simson before the Presbytery ; and Mr Simson having in his answers, which he returned to the libel, stated propositions of a most erroneous kind, the whole matter was brought before the Assembly in 1715. A committee was appointed by them to take cognizance of the case, although the weight and responsibility of the prosecution were still continued upon Mr Webster, as the accusing party. The process was not finished till the

Assembly of 1717, when it was clearly established, from Mr Simson's own answers, that, among other unscriptural opinions, he maintained the following:—"That, by the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, God has given an obscure objective revelation of the gospel; and that it is probable none are excluded from the benefit of the remedy for sin provided by God, and published twice to the whole world, except those who, by their actual sin, exclude themselves, and slight and reject the clearer light of the gospel revealed to the church, or that obscure discovery and offer of grace made to all without the church; and that if the heathen would, in sincerity and truth, and in the diligent use of means that providence lays to their hand, seek from God the knowledge of the way of reconciliation, necessary for their acceptable serving of him, and being saved by him, he would discover it to them:" "That there are means appointed of God for obtaining saving grace, which means, when diligently used with seriousness, sincerity, and faith of being heard, God has promised to bless with success; and the going about these means in the foresaid manner, is not above the reach of our natural ability and power:" "That it is inconsistent with the justice and goodness of God, to create a soul without any original righteousness, or any disposition to good; and that the souls of infants since the fall, as they come from the hands of their Creator, are as pure and holy as the souls of infants would have been created, supposing man had not fallen; and that they are created as pure and holy as Adam's was, except as to those qualifications and habits which he received, as being created in an adult state."*

Notwithstanding that such sentiments as these—which are alike opposed to Scripture and to the doctrine taught in the Confession of Faith—were openly avowed by Mr Simson in his answers, yet the Assembly neither removed him from his important situation, as professor of divinity, nor inflicted any censure on him for having taught these opinions

* Answers to Mr Webster's Libel.

to the students ; but they terminated the process, by giving the following deliverance on the subject, couched in as gentle terms as they could : By their act they find, “ That he had vented some opinions not necessary to be taught in divinity, and that had given more occasion to strife, than to the promoting of edification ; and that he had used some expressions that bear, and are used by adversaries in, an unsound sense ; and that he had adopted some hypotheses, different from what are commonly used among orthodox divines, that are not evidently founded on Scripture, and tend to attribute too much to natural reason, and the power of corrupt nature ; which undue advancement of reason and nature is always to the disparagement of revelation, and efficacious free grace : Therefore, they prohibit and discharge the said Mr Simson to use such expressions, or to teach, preach, or otherwise vent such opinions, propositions, or hypotheses, as aforesaid.”

This same Assembly, which used such gentle language in expressing their disapprobation of the heresies of Mr Simson, manifested a different spirit in the case of the Auchterarder Presbytery. This presbytery, with the view of checking the progress of arminian sentiments, had drawn up certain propositions, to which they required an assent to be given by candidates for license. One of these propositions was,—“ I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin, in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God.” A Mr Craig, being refused an extract of his license by the presbytery, because he would not subscribe this proposition, brought the matter, by appeal, before the Assembly. This court expressed their abhorrence of the proposition as unsound ; they farther ordered the presbytery to give Mr Craig an extract of his license, and prohibited them from using all such expressions for the future. By this condemnation of the *Auchterarder Creed* (as it was scoffingly termed), the Assembly was considered as sanctioning the following doctrine,—that persons must save themselves from the love and power of sin, before

they come to Christ ; which is much the same as teaching that a person must cure himself of his disease, before he apply to the physician : whereas the Saviour says, “ They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

These proceedings of the Assembly were viewed with grief and alarm by a large portion of the population throughout the country. They were regarded as furnishing indications, on the part of the leading men in the church, that they had declined from the purity of the faith, and that they had become, if not the avowed champions of error, at least indifferent to the cause of truth. Corruption seemed to be making rapid strides within the limits of the national church ; and, should nothing be done to arrest its progress, the most fatal results might ere long be anticipated. At this crisis, several ministers, who were revered by the people for their piety, and who were, at the same time, distinguished among their brethren for their talents and learning, united their efforts to check the progress of error, and to diffuse more extensively among the people the influence of sound and Scriptural doctrine. This gave rise to a controversy in the Church of Scotland, which, on account of the important topics involved in it, and on account of the most eminent of her ministers being engaged either on the one side or on the other, excited an extraordinary degree of interest at the time, and the effects of it continued long to be felt. The result of the controversy was, in some respects, highly beneficial to the interests of religion, inasmuch as the excellent publications, which it called forth from the press—relating to the vital doctrines of Christianity—tended to diffuse widely among the people correct views of the gospel, and to lead not a few of them to a more diligent cultivation of practical godliness. I shall lay before my readers, in a condensed form, the particulars of this controversy ; seeing that the spirit which it excited and fostered, had a powerful, and not a very remote, influence in bringing about the Secession.

This controversy originated in the republication of a book

entitled the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Mr Boston, having accidentally met with a copy of this book, while visiting one of his parishioners in Simprin, and having strongly recommended it to some of his brethren, as setting the difference between the law and the gospel in a clear point of view, Mr James Hog, minister of Carnock, was so highly pleased with the sentiments which it contained, that he republished, in 1718, the first part of it, with a recommendatory preface. The Marrow, which consists chiefly of quotations from the writings of some of the most distinguished protestant divines, was originally written, about 1644, by one Edward Fisher,* and at its first appearance was highly recommended by Strong, Caryle, Burroughs, and other eminent non-conforming ministers, members of the Westminster Assembly. Such was the popularity which it acquired, that it went through ten successive editions, and was of great service to not a few, in giving them correct views of the doctrines of the gospel. The republication of it by Mr Hog excited a great ferment among the ministers of the Church of Scotland, especially in the Synod of Fife; for while there were some who highly approved of the sentiments contained in the book, there were others who considered them as of a dangerous tendency,—as tending to relax the obligations to holiness, and to cherish a spirit of antinomianism. .

Among those who took the lead in condemning the Marrow, Principal Haddow, of St Andrews, occupied a prominent place. A sermon, containing some severe strictures upon it, which he preached at the opening of the Synod of Fife, in April 1719, was published by him, at the request of his brethren, under the title of *The Record of God, and Duty of Faith therein required*. The publication of this sermon called forth some smart replies from those of the opposite

* According to some, Fisher originally followed the humble occupation of a barber in London, and afterwards became minister of an Independent congregation: According to others, he was the son of a knight, educated at Oxford, where he took the degree of A. M., and became an excellent Oriental scholar.

side ; the consequence of which was, that a complaint was made to the Assembly, which met that same year, concerning the Marrow of Modern Divinity, as a book containing unscriptural and dangerous sentiments. The Assembly referred the matter to their Commission, and enjoined them to take care, “ that the purity of doctrine be preserved, and to call before them any authors or recommenders of books or pamphlets containing any doctrine not agreeable to the Confession of Faith.” The Commission appointed a committee to take the subject under their consideration, and to prepare an overture concerning it, to be submitted to the next General Assembly. The committee divided themselves into two sections, —the one to meet at St Andrews, and the other at Edinburgh. That section of the Committee which met at St Andrews, prepared extracts from the obnoxious publication, and forwarded them, with their remarks, to the brethren who met in Edinburgh. This latter portion of the committee, in fulfilment of the injunction of the Assembly, summoned before them the following ministers, to account for their conduct ; viz. Messrs James Hog, Carnock ; Alexander Hamilton, Airth ;* James Brisbane, Stirling ; John Warden, Gargunnock ;—all of whom were distinguished for their zeal and their orthodoxy. They were examined severally and apart by the committee. When Mr Hog was called in, he was asked, Whether he avowed himself the author of the preface to the last edition of the Marrow of Modern Divinity ? He answered in the affirmative ; and, in vindication of himself, he stated, that the book had come most unexpectedly into his hands ; that the idea of re-printing it did not originate with himself, but had been suggested to him by others ; and that it was in compliance with the earnest request of these persons he had written the recommendatory preface. He farther added, that the reading of the book had been blessed to many excellent persons ; and that, as for himself, “ he had received more light about some

* Afterwards removed to Stirling.

important concerns of the glorious gospel, by perusing that book, than by any other human writings which providence had brought into his hands.”*

When the Assembly met in 1720, the committee laid before them a report, containing a variety of extracts from the Marrow, which were considered by them as inculcating unscriptural sentiments. These extracts were classed under the following heads:—*Universal atonement and pardon; holiness not necessary to salvation; fear of punishment, and hope of reward, not allowed to be motives of a believer's obedience; the believer is not under the law as a rule of life.* To these were added the six following antinomian paradoxes. 1. A believer is not under the law, but is altogether delivered from it. 2. A believer doth not commit sin. 3. The Lord can see no sin in a believer. 4. The Lord is not angry with a believer for his sins. 5. The Lord doth not chasten a believer for his sins. 6. A believer hath no cause either to confess his sins, or to crave pardon at the hand of God for them, either to fast or mourn, or humble himself before the Lord for them. These, with certain exceptionable expressions, selected here and there from the pages of the Marrow, were laid before the Assembly; and along with them were exhibited those texts of Scripture, and those articles of the Confession of Faith and of the Catechisms, to which these positions were said to be opposed. That the matter might be fully considered, a diet was appointed, at which not only the members but others were permitted freely to state what they had to advance in defence of the Marrow, or against the report of the committee.† The result of the discussion was, that the Assembly gave their sanction to an act, by which “all the ministers of the church were strictly prohibited and discharged, either by printing, writing, or preaching, to recommend the Marrow, or in discourse to say any thing in favour of it; but, on the contrary, they were enjoined and required to warn and ex-

* Boston's Memoirs.

† Antinomianism of the Marrow detected.

hort their people, in whose hand the said book is, or may come, not to read or use the same.”*

The passing of this act by the Assembly occasioned both alarm and distress to many excellent ministers; and the people also were thrown into agitation on account of it. According to the language of the Marrow-men (as they were termed), the Assembly condemned by it “a bundle of sweet and pleasant gospel truths.” They were viewed, by a large class of both ministers and people, as having fixed, under the false charge of antinomianism, the stamp of their reprobation upon some of the most important doctrines of the christian religion. Measures were accordingly adopted, by some of the leading men of the popular party, to bring the subject again under the review of the Assembly, that they might get the obnoxious act repealed. A preparatory meeting for this purpose was held in the house of Mr William Wardrop, apothecary in Edinburgh, at which the following ministers attended,—Messrs James Kidd, Queensferry; Ebenezer Erskine, Portmoak;† his brother Ralph, and James Wardlaw, Dunfermline; William Wilson, Perth; James Bathgate, Orwell; Gabriel Wilson, Maxton; Henry Davidson, Galashiels; and Thomas Boston, Etterick. At this meeting it was agreed, after some time spent in prayer, that a representation should be drawn up, with the view of being laid before the Assembly; and the preparing of it was committed to Mr Ebenezer Erskine,‡ with whom was lodged a draught which had previously been prepared by Mr Boston; and the revising of the whole was entrusted to the brethren in Fife.

After several meetings, and after a careful consideration of the different propositions condemned by the act of Assembly, a representation was at length agreed upon, in which the representers express their grief, that the Assembly, by their condemnatory act, had given a severe wound to gospel truth, inasmuch as, in said act, they had pronounced the fol-

* Act 5th, Assem. 1720.

† Afterwards removed to Stirling.

‡ Boston's Memoirs.

lowing Scriptural positions to be unsound and dangerous, viz. That, in the Gospel, the Father hath made a free, unlimited offer of Christ and of salvation to all men, by virtue of which every individual who hears the Gospel, has a warrant to take hold of said offer, and to apply salvation to his own soul ; that an assured persuasion of the truth of God's promise in the Gospel, with respect to one's self in particular, is included in the very nature of saving faith ; that the believer's holiness is in no way the price nor condition of his salvation ; that believers, in yielding obedience to the law as a rule of life, ought not to be influenced, either by mercenary hopes of heaven, or by slavish fears of hell ; that the believer is not, in any respect, under the law as a covenant of works ; and that it is a just and Scriptural distinction which is made betwixt the law as a covenant of works, and the law as a rule of life in the hand of Christ. *

When the General Assembly met in 1721, this representation was laid before the Committee of Bills, and the representers expected that the subject would be brought immediately under the review of the supreme court. But the King's Commissioner having become suddenly indisposed during the sitting of the Assembly, the court was unexpectedly dissolved ; and the representation was referred to the Commission, with powers to call the subscribers before them, and to have all matters concerning doctrine prepared for the consideration of the Assembly at their next meeting ; but they themselves were not to give a final decision in the business. After the representers had been repeatedly before the Commission, and after an overture had been prepared on the subject of their representation, they were told that they would be required to answer certain queries which would be given them. The questions, which were delivered to them

* The representation was subscribed by twelve ministers, viz. Messrs James Hog, Carnock ; Thomas Boston, Etterick ; John Bonar, Torphichen ; John Williamson, Inveresk ; James Kidd, Queensferry ; Gabriel Wilson, Maxton ; Ebenezer Erskine, Portmoak ; Ralph Erskine and James Wardlaw, Dunfermline ; Henry Davidson, Galashiels ; James Bathgate, Orwell ; and William Hunter, Lilliesleaf.

in writing, were twelve in number, and referred to the different topics alluded to in the representation. They were the following :—

1. Whether are there any precepts in the Gospel that were not actually given before the Gospel was revealed ?

2. Is not the believer now bound, by the authority of the Creator, to personal obedience to the moral law, though not in order to justification ?

3. Doth the annexing of a promise of life, and a threatening of death, to a precept, make it a covenant of works ?

4. If the moral law, antecedent to its receiving the form of a covenant of works, had a threatening of hell annexed to it ?

5. If it be peculiar to believers to be free of the commanding power of the law as a covenant of works ?

6. If a sinner, being justified, has all things at once that are necessary for salvation ? And if personal holiness, and progress in holy obedience, is not necessary to a justified person's possession of glory, in case of his continuing in life after his justification ?

7. Is preaching the necessity of a holy life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, of dangerous consequence to the doctrine of free grace ?

8. Is knowledge, belief, and persuasion, that Christ died for me, and that he is mine, and that whatever he did and suffered he suffered for me, the direct act of faith, whereby a sinner is united to Christ, interested in him, instated in God's covenant of grace ? Or, is that knowledge or persuasion included in the very essence of that justifying act of faith ?

9. What is that act of faith by which a sinner appropriates Christ and his saving benefits to himself ?

10. Whether the revelation of the divine will in the word, affording a warrant to offer Christ unto all, and a warrant to all to receive him, can be said to be the Father's making a deed of gift and grant unto all mankind ? Is this grant made to all mankind by sovereign grace ? And whether is it absolute or conditional ?

11. Is the division of the law, as explained and applied in the Marrow, to be justified ; and can it not be rejected without burying several Gospel truths ?

12. Is the hope of heaven, and fear of hell, to be excluded from the motives of believers' obedience ? And if not, how can the Marrow be defended, that expressly excludes them, though it should allow other motives ?

Some of the brethren demurred to the answering of these questions, as they thought that the proposing of them, in the circumstances of the case, was an undue mode of procedure, and calculated to ensnare ; others, however, were clear that, whatever should be the consequences, the questions ought to be answered, as it would afford them an opportunity of vindicating the truth. It was, therefore, agreed by them, after some consultation, that the questions should be received and answered under a protest, that " their condescension herein shall not be constructed as an approbation of this method of proceeding, nor be improved as a precedent."

The answers were prepared by Mr Ebenezer Erskine and Mr Wilson of Maxton, and were given in to the Commission in March 1722, but they do not appear ever to have been laid before the Assembly, which gave occasion to their being printed and published very soon after. They are long and elaborate, and somewhat tedious withal ; but they discover a profound knowledge of the system of revealed truth, as well as an intimate acquaintance with the theological controversies of the day ; and the person who shall not think it too great a tax upon his time and his patience to peruse them, will find himself amply repaid by the clear exposition, and the excellent defence, which he shall therein find of the doctrine of free grace.

A termination was put to this business by the Assembly, which met in May 1722, passing an act explaining and modifying their former one, though retaining the most obnoxious parts of it. They strictly prohibited all ministers, under pain of the censures of the church, from teaching, either publicly or privately, by writing, printing, preaching, cate-

chising, or in any other way, the positions condemned ; and they charged the several presbyteries and synods, and the Commission, to take particular care that this injunction be punctually observed by all ministers and members of the church, and more especially the presbyteries and synods within whose bounds any of the brethren, who signed the representation, might reside. They farther ordained, that these brethren be rebuked and admonished by the Moderator, on account of injurious reflections contained in their representation ; and, at the same time, it was declared that their conduct deserved a higher censure, but that the Assembly forbore to inflict it, in the hope that lenity exercised toward them would excite them to a more dutiful behaviour in time to come.

The brethren appeared at the bar of the Assembly, and were rebuked and admonished by the Moderator ; but foreseeing what would take place, they had previously prepared and subscribed a protest,* which one of their number was appointed to present. Accordingly, no sooner were the admonition and rebuke administered, than Mr Kidd presented the protest in the name of himself and his brethren. But the Assembly would neither read it, nor allow it to lie on the table, but quickly terminated the sederunt.† In this document, the representers, after enumerating the different steps which had been taken in this business, and briefly stating their objections to the proceedings of the Assembly, *protest*, That they dare not, in any manner of way, no, not by *silence*, consent unto, nor approve of, the acts relative unto this matter ; and that it shall be lawful for them, agreeably to the word of God, and the standards of doctrine aforesaid in this church, to profess, preach, and still bear testimony unto, the truths condemned, or otherwise injured by the said acts of Assembly, notwithstanding the said acts, or whatsoever shall follow thereupon. On the afternoon when the Assembly

* Mr Bonar being prevented by indisposition from attending, his name is not appended either to the protest, or to the answers to the queries.

† Boston's Memoirs.

were to meet to give a final decision in the matter, a dreadful tempest of thunder and hail took place, by which the meeting of the Assembly was delayed for a considerable time. This was considered by many as a visible manifestation of the displeasure of heaven against the "*black work*" in which they were to be engaged. One of the supporters of the Marrow, speaking of this storm, says, "I well remember with what serenity of mind, and comfort of heart, I heard the thunder of that day, the most terrible thunder-clap being just about three o'clock.* It made impression on many, as heaven's testimony against their deed they were then appointed to do, though in this (he wisely adds) it is not for me to determine."

The controversy concerning the Marrow excited a great ferment among the people; and the effects which it produced did not pass away when the controversy ceased. Indeed, few controversies have been carried on within the Church of Scotland which have been productive of more important or more lasting consequences. One of the more direct results of it was, that the attention of the ministers throughout the church was more immediately turned to those grand and leading doctrines which formed the chief topics of discussion; and a line of separation, which gradually became broader and broader, began at this time to be drawn betwixt the ministers themselves, according to the sentiments which they entertained on these controverted points, and according to the side which they espoused in the ecclesiastical courts. Many of the ministers acquired clearer and more enlarged views of the system of revealed truth; the doctrine of free grace was better understood, and more faithfully preached by them; and their ministrations among the people were attended with a greater degree of success: while there were others among them who, that they might be as far removed as possible from the obnoxious sentiments of the Marrow-men, became more decidedly, as well as more avowedly, arminian in their style of preaching. The gospel of Christ

* This was the hour at which the Assembly was appointed to meet.

was exchanged by them for rationalism; and more of their time was spent in the pulpit in declaiming against what they called the antinomianism of the Marrow, than in preaching salvation through the blood of Christ. This empty declamatory mode of preaching prevailed chiefly among the younger divines, who, being newly sent forth from the universities, and being afraid that their literary attainments, and their intellectual acumen, might be called in question, should they be found ranking on the same side with such men as Boston, Hog, and the Erskines, thought that the best method of displaying their zeal and their learning, and of introducing themselves to the notice of their superiors, would be to declaim against antinomianism, and to make their discourses as *rational* and philosophical as possible.

The party spirit which the Marrow controversy kindled, was not confined to one district of the church. It pervaded, less or more, almost all the synods and presbyteries, though it raged more furiously in some than in others. From the zeal which some of the ministers displayed in suppressing the Marrow doctrines, it seemed as if they considered that the existence of their church, and even of religion itself, depended on the suppression of them. In some quarters, the zeal which was displayed in calling to account the abettors of these doctrines, was as great as that which was displayed against the supporters even of popery and of infidelity. The following statement is made by one who took an active part in the proceedings of that period:—" 'Tis the manner of some of your synods, I'm also told, to ask at presbyteries, when to be removed for privy censures, if any in their bounds commends or recommends the Marrow. I don't mind to have read, that ever your church ordered so narrow a scrutiny about any book, besides the acts of the Council of Trent, on the back of your Reformation from Popery. We have been much diverted with the story of a zealous divine with you, who, when this matter came first to be spoken of in his synod, rose up and asked once and again, *Moderator, are we to preach against it?* And, though one of his brethren pulled

him by the sleeve, desiring him to sit down, *for there was no need of such questions*; he still insisted, and at length said, ‘*Moderator, I have done it already, and I would know if I have done well, Yea, or No.*’” *

It would be an act of injustice, however, to the memory of many good men, to affirm that all who united together in condemning the Marrow, were influenced by hostility to the truth. This was far from being the case. There were amongst them many excellent persons, whose piety and orthodoxy were unquestionable, and who, from conscientious motives, opposed the sentiments maintained by the Marrow-men, because they considered them unscriptural, and calculated to injure the interests of sound morality. Though it must be admitted, that the book which gave rise to this controversy, contains in it startling positions, and unguarded expressions, yet it contains in it also (what the title of it imports), the very *marrow* of Gospel truth; and those persons who attempted to fasten upon it, and upon its defenders, the charge of antinomianism, certainly acted under mistaken views, and carried their opposition to an unreasonable length.

Another of the direct consequences which resulted from the agitation of this question, was the more extensive diffusion, among the people, of sound views of Scripture doctrine. The condemning of the Marrow, by the Assembly, and the alarm sounded against it from many pulpits, had quite an opposite effect from what was intended. † The condemn-

* Letter to a gentleman at Edinburgh, a ruling elder of the Church of Scotland, &c.—P. 32.

† “I’m told (says the writer of the *Letter* already quoted), a worthy divine, who spent some of his time at one of our universities, bestowed several Sabbaths on the *Marrow*; holding forth the many damnable errors in the book, and beseeching his dear people, as they tendered the safety of their souls, to be aware of it. Now, this happening ere his people had either seen or heard of the *Marrow*, they were mightily alarmed, and had much discourse among themselves on that subject, but could not agree upon the true name. Some alleged it was the *Marrow of Morality*; but they were corrected by others, who told them it was the *Mother of Divinity*: and many names, less proper than either of these, were offered, scarce two of them agreeing on the same title. However, they were all of them very desirous to see the book.”

ed book was eagerly sought after by the multitude, who perused it with avidity; and, in the greater number of instances, became converts to the opinions which it inculcated. The press also teemed with controversial pamphlets, written, some of them, by the ablest ministers of the church, in which the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel were brought prominently forward into notice. These had an extensive circulation among the people; and, while they imparted to them clearer and more enlarged views of the Gospel system, they tended, at the same time, to produce in them a relish for evangelical preaching. The current of popular opinion ran strongly in favour of those ministers who espoused the Marrow doctrines. Their sacramental occasions were attended by crowds,* many of whom came from a considerable distance; and, in certain instances, so great was the zeal of the people, that they left their own communions, and travelled a day's journey, that they might be present at the communions of those ministers whom they regarded as the champions of the truth. †

* The writer of the *Antinomianism of the Marrow Detected* complains that "there are not a few who turn their backs upon communions in Edinburgh, or the suburbs thereof, and choose, at the very same precise time, to attend them, perhaps at the distance of a day's journey, as if the efficacy of ordinances were to proceed from ministers who distinguish themselves by some singular opinions."

† Carnock, Dunfermline, Orwell, Portmoak, Maxton, and Etterick, were places peculiarly distinguished by the attendance of the people on these occasions. The entertainment, for several successive days, of the strangers who came from all parts of the country to attend these solemnities, was no light tax upon the hospitality of the people, who resided in the neighbourhood of the church. It is but justice, however, to state that it was, in general, exercised in the true spirit of Christian love, and "not grudgingly." Mr Boston mentions, in his *Memoirs*, the following particulars concerning a sacramental occasion at Etterick, where great crowds of people usually attended, and where, as the district was entirely a pastoral one, the houses of the principal parishioners were, during the sacramental season, converted into kind of caravansaries for the entertainment of strangers. "The tokens distributed to communicants," says he, "were about 777; the collection on the three days, £77 : 13 : 4 Scots. There were about *nine score* strangers in Midgehop; four score of them, William Black, husband of Isabel Biggar aforesaid, entertained, having before baked for them half a boll of meal for bread, bought 4s. 10d. Sterling worth of wheat-bread, and killed three lambs, &c., and made thirty beds; and I believe their neighbour's, Robert Biggar, Isabel's brother,

The conduct of the Assembly, in this matter, was viewed with a jealous eye by a considerable proportion of the people. The keenness which they had displayed in condemning a book which had been so highly recommended, and the severity which they had exercised towards the representers in censuring them at their bar, were contrasted with the marked lenity which they had previously shown in the case of Professor Simson ; and fears were entertained lest the majority of them were more inclined to countenance error than to defend the truth. Nor did the subsequent proceedings of the Assembly, which took place immediately after the settlement of this controversy, tend to diminish these fears ; on the contrary, they were such as increased the growing jealousy of the people, and tended to alienate their affections more and more from the ruling party in the church.

Certain rumours having spread abroad that Professor Simson had not only disobeyed the injunctions given him by the Assembly of 1717, but that, in his lectures to the students, he had been guilty of teaching errors still more dangerous than those with which he had formerly been charged, the Presbytery of Glasgow ordered an inquiry to be made concerning the truth of these reports. They appointed a committee to wait upon the Professor, to make him acquainted with the nature of the reports that were in circulation concerning him, and to ask whether or not there was any foundation for them. The Professor declined meeting with the committee, assigning as his reason for doing so, the bad state of his health, which would not permit him to hold a conference with them. He said that if the presbytery had any thing to lay to his charge, they might proceed according to the rules of the church, and he would endeavour to answer them. At the same time, he sent a letter *extrajudicially* to the Presbytery, stating to them what were his views of the would be much the same. This I record once for all, for a swatch of the hospitality of the parish : for God hath given this people a largeness of heart to communicate of their substance, on these and other occasions also. Those within a mile of the church still had the far greater weight on solemn occasions."

doctrine of the Trinity, concerning which he was said to be heretical. The letter not being deemed satisfactory on certain points, a committee of presbytery was appointed to consider it more fully, and to bring in a report upon the subject.

In the mean time, the Assembly met in 1726. At this meeting, the commissioners from several presbyteries stated, that they were enjoined by their constituents to demand that an inquiry be immediately instituted into the reports which were in circulation concerning Mr Simson's teaching unsound doctrine. The Assembly having learned from the commissioners of the Glasgow Presbytery, that they had already taken up the matter, enjoined them to proceed with all diligence in their inquiry into Mr Simson's opinions concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; and they showed a laudable zeal for maintaining the purity of doctrine, by appointing a committee of their most influential members, to co-operate with the presbytery in conducting this important inquiry. Neither the presbytery nor committee were, jointly or separately, to pronounce a final judgment, but to report to the next General Assembly the result of their investigation.

The charges preferred against Mr Simson were, that he had denied the *necessary existence of our Lord Jesus Christ*; and that, in his lectures, he had taught the students, *That the necessary existence of the Son is a thing that we know not; that the phrase Necessary Existence was impertinent, and not to be used when speaking of the Trinity; that the three persons of the adorable Trinity are not said to be numerically one in substance or essence; and that the terms Necessary Existence, Supreme Deity, and the titles of the only true God, may be taken, and are taken, by some authors, in a sense that includes the personal property of the Father, and so not belonging to the Son.* He was farther charged with having disobeyed the injunction of the Assembly of 1717, whereby he was prohibited from using all expressions and hypotheses that were not consistent with the form of sound words contained in Scripture and the Confession of Faith. Two different libels, founded upon these charges, were put into the Professor's

hands, and the depositions of a great number of the students who attended his lectures, were taken. The Assembly's Committee and the Glasgow Presbytery travailed in the business with a commendable zeal and diligence; and the task which they had to execute was by no means an easy one. The Professor, in conducting his defence, displayed both learning and ingenuity. He stoutly disputed every inch of ground, and endeavoured to bewilder his opponents, by leading them into labyrinths of metaphysics, and of scholastic theology. His defence was evasive in a high degree. At one time he rested it on a legal quibble, and at another on some nice metaphysical distinction. When driven from one subterfuge, he took shelter in another; and, by availing himself of every possible plea, which his own ingenuity, or that of his legal advisers, could suggest, he was enabled to protract the process to a considerable length.

When the Assembly met in 1728, the whole of the above charges respecting Mr Simson's views of the Trinity, after a tedious investigation, and after many keen discussions, which had occupied nearly the whole of the time of this and of the preceding Assembly, were found fully substantiated. A considerable number of the members were for inflicting the highest censure—deposition. But the heretical professor had a powerful party of friends, who fought side by side with him, and who endeavoured to put the most favourable construction on every thing he had either said or done. These struggled hard to obtain the appointment of a committee, who should bring in an overture founded on the whole of the previous proceedings, with the view of guiding the Assembly as to the sentence they should pronounce. This motion they had sufficient influence to carry. A committee was appointed to prepare an overture, which should reconcile all parties. Previous to the appointment of this committee, the Professor had given in to the Assembly a paper, disowning the error with which he had been charged, and expressing his belief in the *Necessary Existence* of the Lord Jesus Christ; and, when the committee met, he presented to them another

paper, avowing his belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. This paper was to the following effect :—

“ The Professor is of opinion, and believes, that there is *one only God* ; that, in the unity of the Godhead, there are *three persons, God the Father, &c.* and that the three persons in the Godhead are one substance or essence in number ; and is sorry that, in his teaching, he should have said any thing which has given ground to any to think that he taught any thing contrary to this proposition. JO. SIMSON.”

When the committee gave in their report, they presented this paper along with it ; and, after much reasoning, and various amendments, the overture, which the Assembly adopted, was in substance as follows :—They found that Mr Simson, in the papers given in by him to the Assembly, asserted the necessary existence, and the supreme Deity of Christ ; and that he affirmed his belief in the existence of three persons in one divine essence ; and they declared that his sentiments upon these articles, as expressed in the fore-said papers, were “ sound and orthodox ; ” but, as it had been found proved against him, by this and the preceding Assembly, that he had taught things subversive of these blessed truths, and that he had expressed himself in such terms, as tended to infuse ill-grounded doubts and scruples into the minds of men ; and, as he had neglected so many opportunities of giving satisfaction to the judicatories of the church, concerning his soundness in the faith, with regard to these important articles, they found themselves obliged, for the honour of truth, and in order to prevent the spreading of error, to testify their high dissatisfaction with his conduct : “ And many members declaring, that they thought the said Mr John Simson deserved deposition, the Assembly, after mature deliberation, considering that the process is not entirely finished, and the other circumstances of the case, as it now stands, did agree to suspend Mr John Simson from preaching and teaching, and all exercise of any ecclesiastical power or function, until another General Assembly shall think fit to take off this sentence.” They farther ordered

their proceedings to be printed, and to be transmitted, along with the state of the process, to the several presbyteries, that they might give instructions to their Commissioners to the next Assembly, what they wished farther to be done in this matter.

At the next meeting of the Assembly, in 1729, this business underwent another long discussion. The debates upon it continued for eight days; and, during the whole of that time, the Assembly was crowded with spectators, all of whom took the deepest interest in the proceedings. Though several of those who delivered their sentiments, were for inflicting the sentence of deposition,* yet it was ultimately carried, by Mr Simson's friends, that a committee should be appointed to prepare an overture, with a view to the final settlement of the question. When the overture was brought in, it was found to be nothing more than an echo of the one which had been adopted by the preceding Assembly. It simply affirmed the sentence of suspension, previously pronounced, with this addition, that the committee gave it as their judgment, that it was not fit nor safe that Mr Simson be further employed in teaching divinity, and instructing youth designed for the holy ministry in this church; and, that the judicatories of the church might have no more trouble about this process, it was declared that, for peace-sake, the whole of this matter should rest here.

Mr Simson's friends carefully avoided bringing this overture to a vote. They urged the importance of the Assembly being unanimous in their decision upon this subject, and were exceedingly importunate that the overture should be acquiesced in, without any farther discussion. Though several had, only a little before, been loud in their cry for deposition, yet all now seemed inclined quietly to acquiesce, for the sake of peace. One individual alone had the courage to stand up, and avow his dissent. This was Mr Thomas Boston. When the overture was read, and when the Mo-

* Mr Boston says that the major part of the Assembly were decidedly of this opinion.—*Memoirs*, p. 437.

derator asked, if the Assembly acquiesced in it, there was a breathless silence over the house for a minute or so. Mr Boston then rose, and spoke to the following effect :—“ Moderator, I find myself laid under a necessity of declaring my dissent from this decision of the Assembly, as I think the censure inflicted by it on Professor Simson, is not adequate to the offence he has given, as to the points of doctrine that have been proved he taught the students under his care, and have been found relevant to infer censure. I cannot help thinking, Sir, that the cause of Jesus Christ, as to the great and essential point of his supreme Deity, has been at the bar of this Assembly requiring justice ; and, as I am shortly to answer at His bar for all I do or say, I dare not give my assent to the decision of this act. On the contrary, I find myself obliged, on this occasion, to offer a protest against it ; and, therefore, in my own name, and in the name of all that shall adhere to me, and if none here will,”—here he paused for an instant, and looked round him with an air of gravity and importance, and then added, “ For myself alone, I crave leave to enter my protest against the decision of this act.”* The Moderator (Mr James Alston of Dirleton), interposed, and endeavoured to dissuade him from taking such a step, as it would interrupt the harmony of the decision. But Mr Boston was firm to his purpose. Having previously prepared a paper, containing his reasons of dissent, he read it aloud, as follows :—

“ I dissent, as judging it (inasmuch as it doth not bear a deposition of Mr Simson from the office of the ministry, of teaching and preaching the gospel of the blessed God,) to be no just testimony of this church’s indignation against the dishonour done by the said Mr Simson to our glorious Redeemer, the great God and our Saviour, and what hath been found both relevant and proved against him by the two immediately preceding General Assemblies ; and judging the same also not to be agreeable to the rules of God’s word in

* Letter from a dissenting minister, in the Appendix to Boston’s Memoirs, p. 50. See also Memoirs, p. 438.

such cases, nor to the form of process established in this church; to be saddening to the hearts of the generality of the ministers and godly through the land, and not sufficient to dash the hopes of the proud contemners of revealed religion, and the awful and incomprehensible mysteries of the same, both at home and abroad; nor a fit means to bring the said Mr Simson himself to repentance, whereof as yet he hath given no evidence. All which shall be fully manifested to the world if need be."

When he had finished, the Moderator again addressed him, and with much emotion said;—"Brother, I hope, in this matter, where you see such an appearance of unanimity, you will not do any thing that may have a tendency to rend and divide this church, and tear out the bowels of your mother." To which Mr Boston, still standing, replied,— "Rather, Sir, than what I am now offering should have that effect, I would wish that I and my protest should be buried under a mountain. There are many in this assembly whom I never saw in the face before, nor know; but such of them as I know, and differ from me in this matter, I not only have the utmost charity for them notwithstanding, but I could willingly sit at their feet and learn Christ. However, I cannot see there should be any danger of a breach in this church on this occasion to permit one member, who is grieved and gruelled by this decision, to enter his protest against it." The Moderator, however, continued to urge Mr Boston,— and at length prevailed upon him not to insist, at present, upon the marking of his dissent, but to take the matter into consideration, and to consult some of his brethren, as to the course which he should pursue. Though many of Mr Boston's friends were of the same opinion with himself, as to the merits of the cause, yet, for peace sake, they thought it would be better not to enter a dissent upon the Assembly's record, as doing so might weaken the effect of the decision. Mr Boston, though his sentiments remained unchanged, yielded to their wishes on this point; and when the Assembly met on the following day, he requested permission to address the

house, which being granted, he produced a paper, containing his final resolution, and read aloud as follows :—

“ Moderator, I have, according to your desire, considered again my dissenting from the sentence and decision of this Venerable Assembly in the affair of Mr Simson : and as it was with no design to break in upon the peace of this church, but for the necessary exoneration of my own conscience, that I did formally declare my dissent in that matter, so I can see no ground to retract it, and therefore am far from retracting the same. Yet, forasmuch as the marking of it in your records, which is the only thing that now remains in that matter, is judged by my very reverend fathers and brethren of this Assembly to be of dangerous consequences to the peace of this church, which I think myself obliged in conscience to be very tender of, I do not insist for the marking of it in your records : but having the dissent, as I declared it, by me, in writ, from which I read it before this Venerable Assembly, and having also in writing what I have now delivered, I am resolved, through grace, to make such use of the same afterward, as pressing necessity, in any undesirable event, may be judged to require.”

Thus terminated, in a manner not the most creditable to the General Assembly, one of the most important processes, that was ever brought before that Court. The honour of the Saviour and the interests of religion were deeply involved in it ; and the eyes of the Scottish Church were turned toward their spiritual rulers, to see what would be the decision which they should pronounce. That Mr Simson had been guilty of publicly teaching the erroneous opinions, respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, which were laid to his charge, was established, in the clearest manner, by the witnesses that were examined in support of the libel ; that he had been guilty also of disobeying the injunction of the Assembly of 1717, and that he had, notwithstanding such injunction, inculcated upon the students the sentiments which he had been forbidden to teach—was established, in a manner no less satisfactory, by the evidence laid before the Glasgow

Presbytery and the Assembly's committee. He had kept the whole of the church courts in a ferment, for the space of three years, and had endeavoured by every species of subterfuge and legal quibbling, to extricate himself from the charges that were brought against him ; and at length, when the principal charges were fully established, and when he found that there was some danger of a sentence of deposition going forth against him, he made a public and explicit disavowal of the obnoxious sentiments imputed to him—with the view of averting the storm, and saving at least his salary, if not his situation. Yet, in these circumstances, did the Assembly think, that they sufficiently discharged their duty to their God, and to the church, when they merely suspended the guilty individual from the exercise of his ecclesiastical functions, and declared him unfit to be any longer entrusted with the training of youth for the holy ministry. That the Assembly; with the exception of one solitary individual, should be unanimous in pronouncing such a decision, excites our surprise ; and after making every allowance for a feeling of sympathy operating in favour of the accused, and also for a laudable desire to preserve peace in the church, which influenced the minds of a certain portion of the members,—still we cannot fail to recognise, in such a decision, a considerable indifference manifested to the interests of truth. When we contrast the leniency of the sentence pronounced against Mr Simson, after being *a second time* convicted of heresy, with the fiery zeal which had, only a short while before, burned so hotly against the good men who defended the doctrines of the Marrow, and with the anathemas which had been thundered forth against all who should preach, or any way countenance these doctrines—we do not wonder, that an unfavourable impression should have been produced upon the minds of the people, by the issue of Mr Simson's process ; and that the Assembly should have been accused, not merely of lukewarmness, but of giving their indirect sanction to the grossest errors.

Lest some of my readers may suppose it strange that the

Marrow-men, who on former occasions had been so bold in defence of the truth, should have been silent on the present occasion, it may be proper to mention that, with the exception of Mr Boston, none of them were members of this Assembly. Mr Gabriel Wilson was present, though not a member; and after that the Assembly had declared their acquiescence in the overture proposed to them by the committee, he requested leave to speak, which being granted, he addressed the Moderator as follows:—"In regard I am persuaded this sentence does not duly serve to glorify God our Saviour, nor to preserve this church upon him as the foundation; and in regard it is no wise agreeable to the mind of the Church of Scotland, made known to this Assembly; and that it will, I am afraid (or I am confident), hasten bringing wrath upon this church,—I therefore declare my testimony against it."

In consequence of the proceedings, to which I have adverted in the preceding pages, the minds of the people were considerably fretted, and a growing spirit of dissatisfaction began to manifest itself. Other causes, than those I have now mentioned, in which the interests of the people were more deeply involved, now came into operation,—and the spirit of discontent spread wider and wider, until it fairly burst forth into a flame. The discussions that were carried on concerning the law of patronage,—the high tone which the Assembly began to assume in enforcing the settlement of ministers, in opposition to the avowed wishes of the people,—and the supercilious treatment given to some of the popular ministers, because they would not silently submit to arbitrary enactments, in opposition to the dictates of their own conscience, and to the laws of God—these were the immediate causes which led to the Secession; and with a concise detail of these I shall close this introductory part, and enter upon my main narrative.

That those eminent men, who were instruments in the hand of God for achieving the Reformation in Scotland, considered patronage a great evil in the church,—that they pro-

nounced it to be contrary to the word of God, and contended for the complete abolition of it,—must be sufficiently obvious to any person who peruses the First and Second Books of Discipline. They there declare, that the liberty of the election of persons called to the ecclesiastical functions, was observed without interruption, “so long as the kirk was not corrupted by antichrist;” and they desire that it “be restored and retained within this realm.” They further “desire all them that truly fear God, earnestly to consider, that forasmuch as the names of patronages and benefices, together with the effect thereof, have flowed from the Pope, and corruption of the canon law only, in so far as thereby any person was intruded or placed over kirks, having *curam animarum* (the care of souls); and forasmuch as that manner of proceeding hath no ground in the word of God, but is contrary to the same, and to the said liberty of election, they ought not now to have place in this light of reformation.” *

These were the sentiments of the first reformers of the Scottish Church, in reference to patronage; and they endeavoured, so far as their influence extended, to reduce them to practice. For, in the form of church government which they sketched out, as most agreeable to the word of God, they declared the power of choosing a minister, and other office-bearers, to be vested in the elders and people of the respective congregations. In the First Book of Discipline, it is expressly declared, that “No man should enter in the ministry, without a lawful vocation. The lawful vocation standeth in the election of the people, examination of the ministry, and admission by them both.” And again, “No minister should be intruded upon any particular kirk, without their consent.” † “It appertaineth to the people, and to every several congregation, to elect their own ministers. It is to be altogether avoided, that any man be violently intruded or thrust in upon a congregation; but this liberty, with all care, must

* Second Book of Discipline, chap. xii.

† Sect. iv. of the First Book.

be reserved to every several church, to have their votes and suffrages in the election of their ministers.”*

In the Second Book of Discipline, the same doctrine is taught, though it is limited to a certain extent;—the rule there laid down gives the power of election to the eldership, but at the same time requires the consent of the congregation, to render the election by the eldership valid; and unless this consent were obtained, no ordination could take place. “Election,” says the Second Book, “is the choosing out of a person or persons, most able, to the office that vakes, by the judgment of the eldership, and consent of the congregation, to which the person or persons shall be appointed.” “In the order of election, it is to be eschewed, that any person be intruded in any offices of the kirk, contrary to the will of the congregation to which they are appointed, or without the voice of the eldership.”† The difference betwixt the First and the Second Books of Discipline, with regard to the election of ministers, is, that the First Book allowed the people a positive vote; whereas, by the Second Book, they were allowed only a negative voice; that is, the election or nomination of the candidate lay, in the first place, with the eldership (or session); the person on whom the session fixed, as the object of their choice, was then proposed to the congregation for their *consent*: if the consent was given, the ordination forthwith proceeded; if the candidate was rejected, the election by the eldership was null and void. This was the law of the election of office-bearers in the church, according to the Second Book of Discipline. Though this law did not give to the people all the power, in the election of their office-bearers, to which, according to the Scriptures, they were entitled,—and which had been previously conceded to them, by the First Book of Discipline,—yet it distinctly recognised their right to *accept of*, or to *reject*, any candidate that might be proposed to them; and it did so on the avowed principle, that to have intruded on them any person, or persons, with-

* First Book of Discipline, chap. iv. paragraphs 2 and 4.

† Chap. iii. of the Second Book.

out their consent, would have been contrary to the word of God ; in other words—even taking the lowest view of the question—the consent of the people, in the appointment of their ministers and elders, is here admitted to be a *divine right*, of which they could not be deprived, without trampling upon the authority of God.*

Notwithstanding, however, the enactments contained in the First and Second Books of Discipline, it does not appear that the people were permitted, for a considerable period, to exercise the privileges therein conceded to them. So far down as the year 1649, patronage, with all its grievances, still continued in force ; though, in certain instances, it was somewhat modified. But in that year the Scottish Parliament declared, “ that patronages and presentations of kirks is an evil and bondage under which the Lord’s people and ministers of this land have long groaned ; and that it hath no warrant in God’s word, but is founded only on the common law, and is a custom popish, and brought into the kirk in time of ignorance and superstition ; and that the same is contrary to the Second Book of Discipline, in which, upon solid and good ground, it is reckoned among abuses that are desired to be reformed, and unto several acts of General Assemblies ; and that it is prejudicial to the liberty of the people and planting of kirks, and unto the free calling and entry of ministers into their charges.”† On these grounds, this grievance, so long complained of by the church, was abol-

* A late writer (Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood) has affirmed, that it was never recognised as a law of the Scottish Church, that the people had a *divine right* to choose their own pastors. This is disingenuous. This right is most distinctly implied in the extracts quoted above, from the First and Second Books of Discipline. Why was patronage pronounced to be contrary to the word of God ? Why was the election of the minister declared to be by “ the judgment of the eldership, and consent of the congregation ? ” Why was it to be “ eschewed, that any person be intruded into any office of the kirk, contrary to the will of the congregation ? ” It is scarcely possible that the *principle of popular election* could be stated in broader terms. It might not, indeed, on account of circumstances, be acted upon to its full extent ; but the principle was recognised, as one that was *sanctioned by divine authority* ; and patronage, which is the opposite of popular election, was declared to be contrary to the word of God.

† Act 39.

ished. It was farther recommended, by the same parliament, to the next General Assembly, to determine “the just and proper interest of congregations and presbyteries, in providing of kirks with ministers,” and to ascertain “what is to be accounted the congregation having that interest;” and they were required “to condescend upon a certain standing way for being a settled rule therein for all times coming.” Agreeably to this recommendation of parliament, the Assembly, when they met in July that same year, took up the business; and, before they separated, sanctioned a *Directory for Election of Ministers*, which was substantially the same with that contained in the Second Book of Discipline. According to this *Directory*, the session were invested with the power of electing the ministers; and to the congregation was given the power either of acquiescing in the session’s choice, or of dissenting from it. If a majority of the congregation dissented, and if it was found by the presbytery that the dissent was not grounded “on causeless prejudices,” a new election was appointed to take place.*

This rule continued to be observed till the restoration of the Second Charles, when patronages were again revived, and all ministers who had been inducted into charges, without having received a presentation (that is, since the year 1649), were required to accept of presentations from the legal patrons, or they were to leave their churches. A great number of faithful ministers preferred the latter part of the alternative; they refused to comply with the tyrannical mandate, and were, in consequence, ejected from their charges. Episcopacy was speedily restored, and confusion prevailed throughout the Scottish Church. In the year 1690, immediately after the memorable Revolution, patronages were again, in a certain sense, abolished; and a new enactment was made with regard to the election of ministers. The power of election was vested in the hands of the session and protestant heritors, in country parishes; and of magistrates and town-council and session in burghs; and to the

* *Directory for Election of Ministers*, 1649.

congregation was given the power of approving or disapproving of the choice thus made. Should any opposition be made by the congregation, or by any portion of it, to the candidate proposed, their reasons for doing so were to be laid before the church courts, who were to judge of their validity, and their judgment in the matter was declared to be final. The same act further appointed the sum of six hundred merks to be paid, by every congregation, to the patron, as a remuneration for his being deprived of the right of presentation ; and it also declared, that should no election of a minister take place, in the manner now mentioned, within six months after the congregations had become vacant, the presbytery should be empowered to plant the same.*

This act was rescinded, in 1712, on the ground that it “ had proved inconvenient, and had occasioned great heats and divisions ; ” and the yoke of patronage was again wreathed around the necks of the people. For some time, however, after the revival of the law of patronage, the practical evils of it were not experienced to any great extent, on account of a general disinclination, on the part of ministers, to accept of presentations, and on account of the great number of instances in which presbyteries were permitted to settle vacant congregations, either by virtue of the *jus devolutum*, or by the tacit consent of patrons. The feeling against presentations was decidedly general, amongst both ministers and people ; and repeated instances occur, during the transactions of this period, in which presentations were set aside by the presbyteries, on the ground of the opposition that was made to the presentee by the people, and ministers were inducted that were more agreeable to the wishes of the congregation.

This state of things did not long continue. The laudable squeamishness, which at first prevailed among ministers, with regard to accepting of presentations, gradually diminished. The resistance, of course, on the part of the people, became both more frequent and more obstinate. A spirit was roused, which the leaders of the church courts, with all

* Parl. 1690. Act 23.

their talents and address, found it difficult to manage. Betwixt the law of patronage, on the one hand, enforcing its claims, and the voice of the people, on the other, remonstrating against ecclesiastical tyranny, they felt themselves placed in difficult circumstances. The records of the General Assembly, during the years that immediately preceded the commencement of the Secession, furnish us with numerous instances of appeals, on the part of the people, against the decisions of the inferior courts, in regard to the settlement of ministers. The issue of these appeals was almost uniformly unfavourable. Indeed, when no specific charge was brought against the life or doctrine of the presentees, what else could the Assembly do, according to the constitution of their church, than order them to be inducted? The law of patronage was imperative; and when both patron and presentee were firm in demanding that the law should be carried into effect, it is easy to perceive that the murmurs of the people—loud and deep though they might be—would be of no avail.

What tended to hasten the approaching crisis still more, and added greatly to the difficulty of the supreme court in effecting a settlement in opposition to the wishes of the people, was, that in all contested questions a considerable party of the ministers themselves espoused the popular side. They not only spoke and voted against the violent intrusion of ministers into parishes, but they actually refused to carry into effect the decisions of the Assembly, by absenting themselves from ordinations, even within the bounds of their own presbytery, in those cases where a presentee was ordered to be inducted in opposition to the wishes of the people.

In consequence of this unbending spirit displayed by the more popular ministers, the Assembly felt themselves placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty. These ministers, regarding it as a matter of conscience, would neither be compelled nor cajoled to countenance, by their presence, those violent settlements, which were now becoming so frequent throughout the country. Besides, they had the great majo-

rity of the people on their side; and if the Assembly had peremptorily commanded them to carry into effect their decisions upon pain of suspension or deprivation, it would have occasioned a breach in their church, much more serious than that which afterwards took place. In these circumstances, being unwilling to risk their authority against the refractory ministers on the one hand, or to succumb before the opposition of the people on the other, they had recourse to a poor expedient, in order to carry into effect their own arbitrary decisions. The expedient which they adopted was at once unscriptural, unconstitutional, and at variance with sound policy. In those cases, where a violent settlement was appointed to take place, instead of rendering it imperative on the presbyteries to proceed with the ordination in the usual way, the Assembly or Commission appointed a committee of their own number, or members from some of the neighbouring synods or presbyteries, to meet and ordain the obnoxious presentee, leaving it optional to the ministers of the presbytery within whose bounds the ordination took place, either to attend or not, as they might think proper. Such a mode of procedure was calculated to bring the authority of the supreme court into contempt, and tended to foster, rather than repress, a spirit of resistance on the part of the people. This expedient was first adopted in 1729, in the case of New Machar, and continued to be resorted to, in cases of difficulty, for a period of twenty years, when it was abandoned; and presbyteries were peremptorily enjoined to proceed with the settlement of presentees according to the usual mode, whether the settlement was agreeable to their wishes or not.*

The state of affairs in the national church at this period, even its greatest admirers must admit, was deplorably bad. The people groaned under the yoke of patronage, and in vain did they apply for relief to their ecclesiastical rulers. These, so far from listening to their complaints, or sympathizing with them, seemed resolved to carry matters with a high hand.

* Appendix to Moncrieff's Life of Erskine, p. 442.

The violent intrusion of ministers upon reclaiming congregations prevailed in every part of the country. At every meeting of the Assembly, for several successive years, no small portion of their business consisted in considering cases of appeal, that were occasioned by the attempt to impose ministers upon parishes in opposition to the wishes of the people. In the journal of the Assembly's proceedings for 1730, there are recorded no fewer than *twelve* cases of this description.* The mentioning of this fact may serve to give my readers some idea of the agitated state of the country at the time immediately preceding the commencement of the Secession. Some of these cases were protracted from one Assembly to another; and during the time that they were thus kept in dependance, the minds of the people were kept in a state of the greatest excitement. In certain instances, the presbyteries and synods were inclined to support the claims of the people; but when their cause came to be discussed at the bar of the Assembly, or when it was referred by the Assembly to the Commission, their appeal was almost uniformly unsuccessful.

The policy pursued by those who took the lead in the church courts at this period, obviously tended to establish a species of ecclesiastical despotism, in the exercise of which they might give effect to the law of patronage, and crush the doctrine of popular election, so keenly contended for by the people, and by a considerable portion of the ministers. Complaints were made, that the Commission, in certain instances, sustained calls which had been attested merely by a notary public, without any moderation having taken place by appointment of presbytery. The powers exercised by the Commission were of an arbitrary and odious kind; they reversed the sentences of synods, even though their number might be inferior to that of the synod whose sentence was

* The parishes mentioned are the following :—Renfrew, Crimond, New-Machar, Old-Machar, Towie, Hutton, Kinross, Dunblane, Balfreone, Eccles, Kiltearn, Marykirk. Some of these cases were continued from one Assembly to another.

reversed ; and they censured presbyteries and synods for testifying their displeasure against those ministers who accepted of presentations. The Assembly occasionally found fault with the Commission for having exceeded the powers intrusted to them ; but it was remarked, that though they censured them, they seldom, if ever, reversed their objectionable proceedings. In certain cases, where the people proved refractory, and where the presbytery was resolved to grant induction to an unpopular candidate, an armed force was employed to carry into effect the decisions of the church courts ; and the unseemly spectacle was now and then exhibited of the ministers of religion being guarded to church upon a Sabbath by files of dragoons, amid the noise of drums, and the flashing of swords, that they might serve the edict of an hireling, to whose ministry the people were resolved not to submit. A writer of that day gives the following account of a scene of this kind which took place at Bathgate, at the serving of the edict of Mr Thomas Laurie, by appointment of the presbytery of Linlithgow :—" These and such like things were done to terrify the people ; and yet for all that, these gentlemen and the two ministers that were to serve the edict, being conscious to themselves of the badness of their cause, and what an evil part they were acting, thought not fit to do it until they got a troop of dragoons to be a guard to them ; and accordingly, November 17, 1717, being the Sabbath day, they came to Bathgate, and when approaching the town, they caused beat their drum, and draw their swords, and in this posture came through the town, guarding the ministers into the church, riding and striking, with their naked swords, at the women and others standing gazing upon the wayside, which was a melancholy Sabbath in Bathgate, the Sabbath day being much profaned, not only by the people of the place, but by many coming from other parishes, to see a new way of propagating the Gospel by red-coat booted apostles officiating as elders." *

* Letter to a minister of the gospel, concerning the parish of Bathgate, 1720, p. 18.

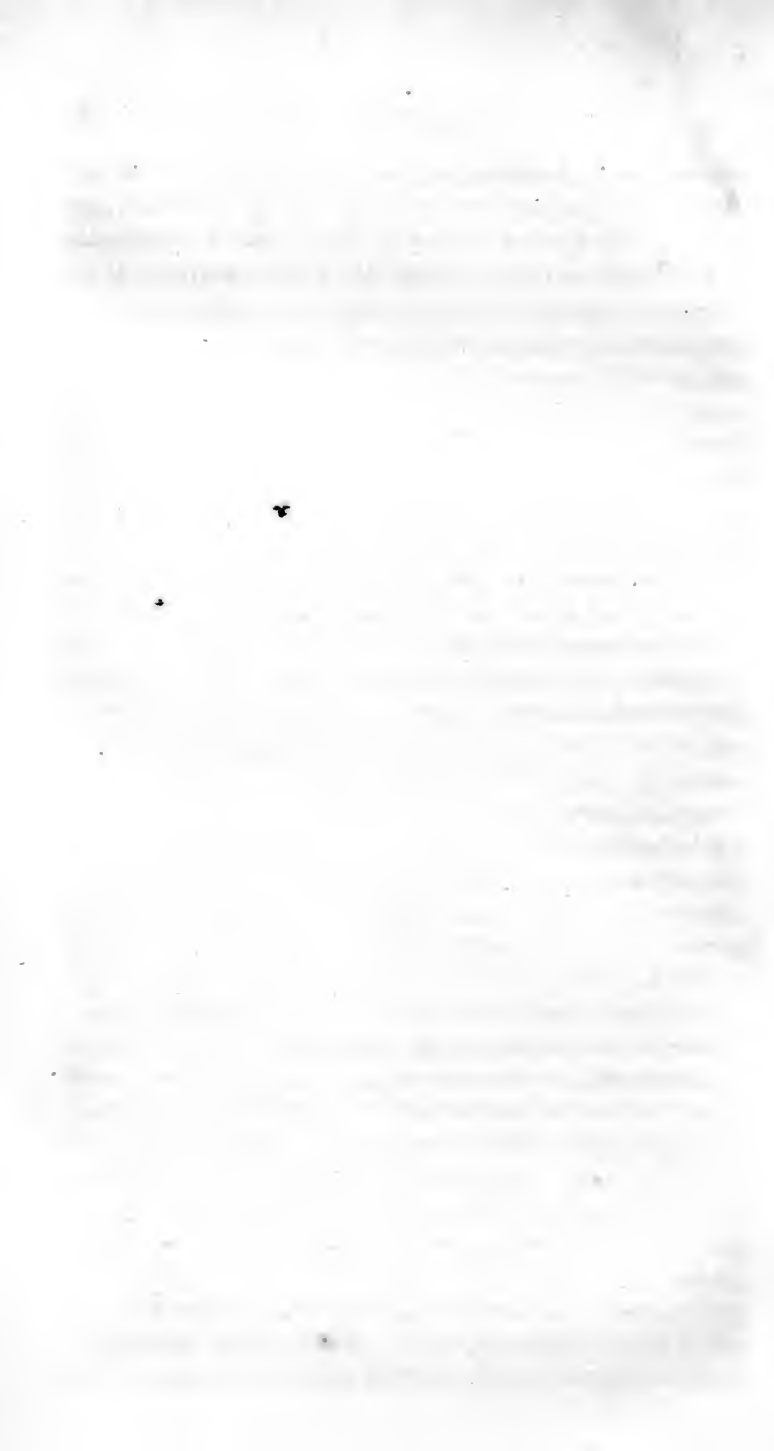
In 1730, the Assembly, having affirmed the sentence of the Commission, enjoined the presbytery of Chirnside to proceed with a violent settlement in the parish of Hutton. Several members craved that their dissent from this decision might be recorded. This was refused, on the ground, that the granting of it would “tend to disturb the peace of the church!” And before the Assembly dismissed, it was solemnly enacted, that henceforward no reasons of dissent “against the determination of church judicatures” shall be entered on the record.

By such arbitrary proceedings as these, the minds of the people, and of not a few of the ministers, were much irritated; and that a revolt should ere long take place against the misgovernment of rulers, who showed such a total disregard of the feelings of those whose spiritual interests they were bound to promote, was nothing more than might have been expected. In looking back to the transactions of that period, instead of wondering that so many excellent men left the pale of the Establishment when the Secession commenced, our only surprise is, that they continued so long to abide in her communion. No measures could have been adopted that were better fitted for secularizing the Scottish Church, than those which the dominant party, in her ecclesiastical courts, actually pursued. That this was the object which they had in view in adopting these measures, I shall not take upon me to affirm, but that this was the decided tendency of the course which they pursued, is sufficiently obvious. In conducting their administration, they were guided more by the dictates of worldly policy, than by the maxims of Scripture; when argument failed in silencing objections, they employed force, and when men could not be induced by persuasion to submit to their arbitrary enactments, they had recourse to terror. Armed with the authority of the state, as well as of the church, they aimed at bearing down all opposition, by occasionally calling into their aid the strong arm of the law. That men should tamely submit, for any length of time, to have their feelings outraged, their rights trampled upon, and

their complaints disregarded, without making any effort to emancipate themselves from the tyranny which subjects them to such wrongs, is what we have no reason to expect from human nature. Those who are oppressed, will take the first opportunity that presents itself of breaking the yoke from their necks, and, having burst asunder their fetters, will dash them in the face of their oppressors. My readers, after perusing the preceding statements, will not be surprised to be told, that the minds of a considerable portion of the people in Scotland were alienated, by the transactions referred to, from their ecclesiastical rulers; and that no sooner was a way of escape opened up to them from the grievous trammels to which they were subjected, than multitudes eagerly availed themselves of it. This way of escape was opened up by the Secession which took place from the National Church,—an event which, though greatly deplored at first, has been productive of essential benefit to the country, and is every day spreading its blessings wider and wider. I cannot but regard it as a merciful interposition of Providence, on behalf of our land, that the Secession Church sprung into existence at the time it did, seeing that it has been honoured of God as an instrument for maintaining, in an eminent degree, sound doctrine, purity of discipline, and religious liberty, in this northern part of the island; seeing that, from first to last, many thousands of pious Christians have found a quiet retreat in its bosom from the evils of patronage, and from the other grievances complained of in the Establishment; and seeing that, by means of the reflex influence which it has exercised upon the national church, it has considerably checked it in its progress of deterioration, and rendered it, in some respects, more efficient.

Having thus taken a review of the leading events connected with the ecclesiastical history of our country, from the period of the Revolution, till the uplifting of the standard of the Secession; and having pointed out the causes which prepared the minds of men for an extensive revolt from the judicatories of the Established Church of Scotland, I shall

now detail, as faithfully and as minutely as I can, the various particulars connected with the rise, progress, and present attitude of that portion of the Christian community whose history it is the object of the present narrative to record.



PART I.

FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SECESSION, TILL
THE DIVISION OCCASIONED BY THE CONTROVERSY
ABOUT THE BURGESS OATH.

CHAPTER I.

Overture concerning the Jus Devolutum. Passed into a Law. Mr Ebenezer Erskine and other brethren protest against it. Their protest refused. Representation of ministers and elders. Representation of 1700 persons. Representations rejected. Violent settlement at Kinross. Mr Ebenezer Erskine's Sermon at Perth. Complaint made concerning it. Committee of Synod appointed to investigate. Objectionable passages adduced by the committee. Charges founded on them. Mr Erskine's answers. Debate in Synod. Mr Erskine found censurable. Refuses to submit to censure. Twelve ministers and two elders protest against the decision of Synod. Mr Erskine and Mr Fisher protest and appeal to the General Assembly. Proceedings of the General Assembly. Sentence of Synod affirmed. Mr Erskine rebuked and admonished. Protestation by Messrs. Erskine, Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher. Assembly in an uproar. The four brethren appointed to appear before the Commission. Proceedings of the Commission. The four brethren suspended from the exercise of their ministry. Their pastoral relation loosed. Declared no longer ministers of the Church of Scotland. Mr Gabriel Wilson and six other ministers protest against this decision. Protestation of the four brethren. Vindication of the Fathers of the Secession.

By the law of patronage, it was provided, that if a patron did not exercise his right of presenting an individual to a parish, within six months after it became vacant, the presbytery should (*jure devoluto*) take measures for inducting a minister into the parish. As the cases which occurred of

this description were numerous, and as the presbyteries, when the right devolved upon them, sometimes gave the people the liberty of choosing their ministers, and at other times exercised a species of patronage themselves, so it was deemed desirable that a uniform method of procedure should be adopted by presbyteries, in the appointment of ministers to vacant parishes. The doctrine of the *divine right* of the people, to choose their own pastors, was openly insisted upon in the church courts; and in those presbyteries, where the party preponderated that held this doctrine, it was reduced to practice, to the great satisfaction of the people. It was with the view of crushing this doctrine, and of preventing it from being acted upon in any part of the church, that an overture was brought before the Assembly of 1731, and by them ordered to be transmitted to the different presbyteries; that, according to the barrier act, they might consider it, and report at next meeting whether or not it should be passed into a law. The avowed object of the overture was to produce a uniformity in the method of settling vacant parishes, in those cases where the right of appointment devolved upon the presbyteries; and, at the same time, to do this in such a way as to give no countenance to the doctrine of popular election; inasmuch as this doctrine was exceedingly unpalatable to the ruling party in the church, and could not be acted upon, consistently with the law of patronage, which they were resolved, at all hazards, to enforce. By this overture, it was proposed, that the election of a minister for a vacant parish, should belong only to elders, and to protestant heritors; and, in royal burghs, to the magistrates, town council, and elders; and, if any part of the burgh was landward, the heritors, being protestant, were to vote along with them. After the election, the person elected was to be proposed to the congregation, to be by them "either approven or disapproven." If the congregation disapproved of the choice by the elders and heritors, they were to lay their reasons before the presbytery, "by whose determination the calling and entry of the minister should be concluded ac-

according to the rules of the church.* It is true, as has been affirmed, that this overture imposed no greater restrictions upon the freedom of the people, in the choice of their ministers, than had formerly been imposed by the act of Parliament in 1690; but there was this great difference, that, in the one case, it was the ministers of religion, the spiritual guides of the people, that were infringing upon the Christian privileges of the people; and, in the other, it was the rulers of the state who, for political purposes, restricted the freedom of election. Formerly, notwithstanding the existence of acts of Parliament, the presbyteries, in cases where the right of planting vacant parishes devolved upon them, frequently granted to the people all the liberty that they could wish for, in choosing their own ministers. Now, it was resolved, by the ruling party, to render it imperative on all presbyteries to pursue the same restrictive rule, in every case; that is, in no one instance, to grant to the people the liberty of election, but to restrict the privilege to elders and protestant heritors. Heritors, whether resident or non-resident, were permitted to choose *by proxy*. It was not even required of them, that they be members of the church. They might be grossly ignorant, or immoral, or profane; they might be episcopalian, or infidel, or any thing, provided they only bore the general name of protestant; the mere circumstance of their being *heritors* was considered as peculiarly qualifying them, above all other men, for choosing office-bearers for the house of God. That statesmen, who regard the church as a mere engine of government, and who look upon her office-bearers as so many tools ready made for the accomplishment of political purposes, should have sanctioned such an idea, does not at all surprise us; but that ministers of the Gospel should have introduced, and urged the adopting of such a measure as the one now mentioned, and should have extolled it as the best possible that could be adopted, does excite astonishment. No other proof is

* Act 8th Assembly 1732.

necessary to convince us that, in their administration of church affairs, they were under the influence of a secular spirit. While they took away from the bulk of the Christian people a privilege which Scripture allows them, they vested it in a class of men whom neither reason nor Scripture recognises as having any particular claim to it, and who, of all classes of men in a parish, are frequently the worst qualified for the proper exercise of it.

Such was the nature of the overture that was transmitted to presbyteries for their sanction ; and, in the meantime, they were enjoined to make it the rule of their procedure, until the Assembly should meet.* When the Supreme Court met, in 1732, reports were given in from forty-nine presbyteries ; and the following was the state of opinion expressed by them :—*Thirty-one* presbyteries decidedly rejected the overture ; *six* approved of its being passed into a law, without any alterations ; and *twelve* gave their sanction to it, on condition that certain material amendments, which they suggested, should be adopted. From *eighteen* presbyteries no reports were received.† It requires no particular skill in arithmetic, to be able to say that, in so far as the opinion of the presbyteries was expressed, the decided majority was *against* the overture ; and the Assembly, according to the constitution of their own church, ought immediately to have thrown it aside. The ninth act of the General Assembly, 1697, requires, ‘ That before any General Assembly of this church shall pass any acts which are to be standing rules and constitutions to the church, they be remitted as overtures to

* Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, in the Appendix to his Life of Erskine, (p. 443), states that the Assembly of 1732, passed this overture into a law, by their own authority, *without transmission to presbyteries*. Such an instance of ignorance with regard to the history of his own church, on the part of one who was for many years looked up to as one of the leaders of the popular party, excites our surprise, and makes us receive, with considerable distrust, other statements which he makes concerning the state of parties at the commencement of the Secession. I would have been inclined to regard it as an oversight, were it not that the Reverend Baronet *repeats* the statement, and makes it the ground-work of some of his reasonings.

† Gib’s Display, vol. i. p. 26.

the consideration of the several presbyteries, and their opinion and consent be reported by their commissioners to the next Assembly, that they may pass the same into acts, if the more general opinion of the church agree hereto." Admitting the matter to have been doubtful, men of wisdom would have paused before they enacted into a law, that which thirty-one presbyteries entirely disapproved of, and which other twelve declared stood in need of material amendment. Whatever portion of wisdom the Assembly of 1732 possessed, it did not appear to be that which " cometh from above ;" neither could it be said of it, that it was " peaceable," or " without partiality," or " full of good fruits." The Assembly, by a logic very convenient for those who are resolved on carrying a point, took it for granted, that all the presbyteries who had sent up no reports, were *for* the overture, according to the maxim that *silence gives consent*. It was, moreover, urged by the high churchmen of that period, that though they were required, by the barrier act, to submit to presbyteries any proposed measure, before passing it into a law, yet they were not bound to be guided implicitly by their advice. By such reasonings, the supporters of the overture obtained a majority of the Assembly in its favour, notwithstanding the opposition that was made to it ; and it was declared, that henceforward, in all cases when the settlement of vacant parishes devolved upon the presbyteries, this should be the rule that should regulate their procedure. So intent were the prevailing party on carrying their favourite measure, without any amendment, that they would not even agree to restrict the vote of heritors to such as had residence within the parish, or to such as were of the communion of the Church of Scotland. Against the decision of the Assembly adopting the overture, several ministers and elders, amongst whom were Mr Ebenezer Erskine, and the other brethren with whom the Secession originated, protested ; but the Assembly refused to receive their protest, or to enter it upon their record ; in consequence of which refusal, the reasons of protest were afterwards extended, and published in the form of a pamphlet, entitled, " De-

fections of the Church of Scotland, from her reformation principles, considered.”*

So great was the alarm excited throughout the country by the headstrong and tyrannical conduct of those who, at this period, bore sway in the church courts, that no fewer than forty-two ministers and three elders gave in a representation and petition to the Assembly of 1732, in which they enumerated a variety of grievances, and craved redress ; but so far were they from obtaining satisfaction, that their representation was not allowed even to be read, whereupon fifteen of the subscribers protested ;† and as the Assembly would not receive their protest, it was published along with their representation. At the same meeting, a paper, containing similar complaints, and craving similar redress, was presented, signed by upwards of 1700 persons, who acted without any previous concert with the ministers.‡ The committee, to whom the paper was presented, having refused to transmit it, the commissioners of the people complained at the bar of the Assembly, when they received the same contemptuous treatment that the ministers had met with : their representation was refused a hearing, against which treatment they protested in the name of their constituents, and took instruments in the hands of a public notary. Such things as these were sufficiently provoking ; and we need not wonder that a spirit of indignation should have been roused both amongst ministers and people, when their complaints were disregarded, their petitions rejected, and when those members of Assembly, who felt their consciences aggrieved by the unrighteous proceedings of the majority, were denied the privilege of having their dissent or protest recorded.

Amongst the many violent settlements which took place at this period, that of Kinross deserves to be noticed, on ac-

* Brown's MS.

† Amongst this number were the Rev. Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, Stirling ; Alexander Moncrieff, Abernethy ; William Wilson, Perth ; James Fisher, Kinlaven ; Ralph Erskine, Dunfermline ; Thomas Mair, Orwell ; Thomas Nairn, Abbotshall, &c. &c.

‡ Gib's Display, vol. i. p. 26.

count of the outrageous contempt of popular feeling which it displayed, as well as on account of the peculiar severity with which those ministers were treated who refused to concur in the settlement. The parishioners had given a call to a Mr Francis Craig, but another person (Mr Stark) had received the presentation. As this latter gentleman had scarcely a single vote, the presbytery of Dunfermline refused to ordain him. The Commission, in the exercise of their omnipotence, appointed a sub-committee to proceed to Kinross and effect the settlement, in spite of the opposition of both the presbytery and people. Against this arbitrary and unconstitutional proceeding of the Commission, complaints and petitions were presented both by the parishioners and by the presbytery to the Assembly; these were, as usual, rejected, and the presbytery were enjoined, "in the high tone of church authority," to enrol and acknowledge Mr Stark as one of their number; and when Mr Ralph Erskine and others tendered a protest against this decision, the clerk was prohibited from entering it on the records of the Assembly. The matter did not rest here, for a complaint being made at next meeting of Assembly,* that the presbytery had refused to enrol Mr Stark, the recusant brethren were forthwith summoned to the bar of the court, and sharply rebuked for their disobedience; and a committee was appointed to meet with such of the brethren of the Dunfermline presbytery as were in town, and to get Mr Stark judicially enrolled. The presbytery were, moreover, commanded to encourage and strengthen the hands of Mr Stark in the work of the ministry,—they were forbidden to offer or receive any protest against his sitting and acting as a member of their court,—they were not to administer sealing ordinances to any of his parishioners without his consent,—and, finally, they were commanded to appear before the Commission, at their meeting in August, to report concerning their own obedience; and the Commission were empowered to inflict the highest censure of the church upon such as should be guilty of dis-

* The Assembly of 1733.

obedience. Upon the principles of strict presbyterian government, the members of the Dunfermline presbytery cannot, in this instance, be vindicated from the charge of contumacy, in refusing compliance with the decision of the Supreme Court; either they ought formally to have declined its authority, as some of them afterwards did, when they joined the Secession, or while they continued to profess subjection, they ought to have obeyed. At the same time, the conduct of the Assembly and of their Commission was arbitrary in a high degree, and peculiarly calculated to excite opposition.

The situation of the faithful ministers of the Church of Scotland was at this time sufficiently distressing. They had the mortification to behold measures, which they considered unscriptural and oppressive, carried by triumphant majorities. Against these measures in vain did they remonstrate and petition: their remonstrances were not listened to, and their petitions were disregarded. They were even denied the common privilege of having their dissent or protest marked, in cases where they felt their consciences materially aggrieved; nay, so high did the predominant party stretch their authority, and so imperious the tone which they assumed, that, in certain instances, the Commission were enjoined to summon before them, and to rebuke, those persons who should offer a protest, and the presbytery who should receive it.* Beyond this, ecclesiastical despotism had but one step farther to advance,—and that was to im-

* An instance of this occurs in the proceedings of the Assembly, with regard to the Dunfermline Presbytery, and the violent settlement of Mr Stark, at Kinross, already mentioned. The Assembly, with the view of effectually silencing all opposition, passed an act, in which they strictly discharged “the offering, admitting, or receiving any protest or dissent by any member of said presbytery, or other person whatsoever, against the said Mr Stark’s sitting and acting in the Presbytery of Dunfermline, as a member thereof, and minister of Kinross.” And they empowered the Commission “to summon before them any person or persons, who shall offer any such protest or dissent; and also the said presbytery, if they shall receive or admit the same, and censure the said persons or presbytery, as they shall see cause.”—*Act 5th Assembly 1733.*

pose restraint upon ministerial faithfulness in the pulpit. Here also it endeavoured to carry its terrors, and it was the foolish attempt to do so, that led directly to the Secession.

Those ministers who belonged to the popular party, considered it their duty to testify from the pulpit against those measures, which they deemed injurious to the interests of religion, but which they had not sufficient influence to prevent from being carried in the church courts. This was a privilege which the ministers of Scotland had long claimed and enjoyed ; and though, certainly, like every other privilege, it is liable to be abused, and requires much delicacy and judgment to use it aright ; yet there can be no doubt, that, in some of the past periods of our history, the exercise of it by faithful ministers has been productive of much benefit both to the church and to the country : And if any period can be mentioned, in which ministerial freedom, in this respect, was more allowable than at another, that period was the one to which this part of my narrative refers. The ruling party in the church courts thought otherwise ; and as they had previously declared, by an arbitrary enactment, that no protest should be received or recorded against any measure they might be pleased to adopt, however unconstitutional in itself, or hurtful in its tendency ; so they were resolved to stretch forth the rod of their authority, with the view of preventing their opponents from exposing their unscriptural proceedings, in the ministrations of the pulpit. Such a practice as this could not but be galling to them, and it was natural for them to endeavour to suppress it. For this purpose, it was necessary that an example should be made of one of the most influential, as well as most obnoxious, of their opponents ; so that, by the censure inflicted, others might be deterred from pursuing a similar course.

The individual whom they fixed upon for the purpose of making this experiment, was Mr Ebenezer Erskine, one of the ministers of Stirling. This person ranked high as a faithful, laborious, and successful preacher of the gospel. The talents which he possessed were of the most popular

description ; his influence was great, and he was not more distinguished for the clear evangelical views which he had of the truth, than for the fearless manner in which he avowed them, and for his intrepidity in defending them. He was beloved and revered by the people, and he was looked up to with respect by an extensive circle of friends in the ministry. In all the questions which had been brought before the Assembly, involving in them the interests of the truth, and the Scriptural rights of the people, he had, from his first entrance into the ministry, uniformly espoused the popular side, and had ever shown himself a keen opponent of the secularizing and arbitrary measures pursued by the court party. He had taken an active part in the Marrow controversy ; and, in the process carried on against Professor Simson, he had done what he could to strengthen the hands of those who were contending for the truth. Repeatedly had the shafts of calumny been directed against him, with the view of injuring his character, and destroying his usefulness. Already had he, when a minister in Fife, been accused, first before the Synod, and next before the Commission of the General Assembly, of teaching doctrines inconsistent with the Confession of Faith ; by which his accusers meant the obnoxious doctrines of the Marrow.

That a person of Mr Erskine's character and influence should be obnoxious to those who could not brook opposition to their measures, and that they should be desirous of an opportunity to check his boldness, was natural. Such an opportunity was furnished by a sermon which he preached at Perth, at the opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, on the 10th of October, 1732. The subject of his discourse was Psalm cxviii. 22, "The Stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner." In this discourse, Mr Erskine, when describing the wicked conduct of the Jewish priests and rulers during the period of Christ's personal ministry, made some pointed allusions to the late transactions of the General Assembly, and to the state of affairs in general throughout the Scottish Church ; at the

same time, his statements were so carefully guarded, that there was nothing personal in them ; but each individual of his hearers was left to make an application of them to his own conscience. The sermon, which has long been before the public, contains in it no uncommon display of talent ; but is chiefly distinguished as being a clear, faithful, and practical exposition of the text, and by its peculiar appropriateness to the circumstances in which it was preached.

Several members of Synod were highly offended with the freedom which Mr Erskine had used in his discourse ; and after the court was constituted, and a new Moderator chosen, a formal complaint was made upon the subject. Mr Adam Ferguson, minister at Logierait, who took the lead in the business, moved for investigation. He was immediately supported in his proposal by Mr James Mercer, minister at Aberdalgie ; Mr James Mackie, minister at Forteviot (afterwards at St Ninians) ; and the Laird of Glendoig, ruling elder.* After a long discussion, the synod agreed to take the matter under consideration ; and a committee was appointed to collect the passages which had given offence, and to lay them before the court at their next sederunt. The committee, before preparing a report, appointed four of their number (viz. Messrs William Moncrieff, William Stewart, Alexander M'Lagan, ministers, and the Laird of Glendoig) to wait upon Mr Erskine, and to tell him, "That some expressions in his sermon gave offence, and to condescend upon some particulars uttered by him in his said sermon that did so ; and to deal with him, to see if he will acknowledge he was in the wrong in emitting such expressions, and will promise, before the synod, that he will not express himself, on

* Ferrier's Memoirs of the Rev. William Wilson, p. 196. The following extract shows what was the opinion which Mr Wilson entertained of these men who took the lead in this business. Of Mr Mercer he says, that he was "a hot, violent man,—a plague on the Presbytery of Perth, and most active always in a bad cause." Mr Mackie he characterizes as "a man more smooth and subtile than his brother, but his hand still as deep in a course of defection." The Laird of Glendoig, he says, "is a man that follows the fashion of the present time ; his principles and conduct in the judicatories appear to be of a piece."

public occasions, in time coming, after that manner." Mr Erskine gave a decided negative to the proposal of the committee, stating that his mind was completely made up on these points.

On the following day, the committee presented their report to the synod, and along with it they laid on the table a paper containing the objectionable passages of Mr Erskine's discourse, with their own remarks upon them. In laying these passages before my readers, it is necessary to premise, that, being noted down from recollection by individual members of the committee, the words employed by the committee are not exactly the same as those which Mr Erskine employed in delivering the sermon. They were the following:—

1. That in mentioning the corruptions and degeneracies of the Jewish priests, Mr Erskine said, "that he left it to the consciences of every one to judge what of these corruptions were to be found among ourselves at this day."

2. That, speaking of the corrupt notions of the Messiah's kingdom entertained by the Jewish teachers, he subjoined, "that he might be allowed to say, that mistaken notions of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, was the ground of many things which were wrong amongst us at this day."

3. That, in characterizing the Jewish teachers, he said, "that they, being connected with the great, trampled upon the people as an unhallowed mob."

4. "That it was a great crime to intrude into that office (of a minister) without a mission; that in order to one's being accounted a builder, there were two things necessary—the call of God and the call of the church; that they who had not the call of the church should be looked on as thieves and robbers; and that this call ought not to be by the heritors, or any other set of men, but by the whole church."

5. "That this was a natural right that every society had, to choose servants for themselves; and that it would be counted a great bondage and servitude upon any family, if foreigners were to choose servants for them; and that cer-

tainly the church had the power of choosing her own ministers, seeing that they were the freest society upon earth."

6. After mentioning the encroachments that had been made on Christ's kingly office in the times of popery and prelacy, he said, "That after the late wonderful revolution, by which our church was delivered, it might have been expected that this church would have given some testimony of these encroachments; but that he did not remember ever they had made an act asserting the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ since the revolution."

7. Speaking of the encroachments which had been made on Christ's kingly office, and the rights of the people since the revolution, he said, "That a cry had gone up to heaven about these things in the words of the Spouse, 'That the watchmen that went about the city, had found her, and taken away her vail from her, and smote her:' that this cry came before the bar of the last General Assembly; but, that instead of redressing this and other grievances, they increased them, by lodging the power of election in the hands of heritors and elders, excluding the people, whereby Christ was deeply wounded in his members." He farther added, "that whatever church authority there was in that act, there was nothing of the authority of the Head of the church; that he was sure that it had no foundation in Scripture, where there is no distinction, in spiritual matters, made betwixt the rich man with the gold ring and the gay clothing, and the poor man." And he concluded with this, "That if Christ were personally present (and I being here by the appointment of the Synod, am in his stead), I say, were Christ personally present, he would say to you, 'Forasmuch as you have done it to one of these little ones, you have done it to me.'"

8. In the end of his discourse, he gave this advice to ministers, "Not to be as dumb dogs, when their fellow-builders go wrong; and though this will offend, yet, he said, he behaved to speak."

These were the whole of the objectionable passages which

the committee laid before the Synod ; and by the remarks which accompanied them, they attempted to found upon them the following charges against Mr Erskine :—

1. “ That the strain of a great part of the sermon appears to compare the ministers of this church with the most corrupt teachers under the Old Testament.”

2. “ He refuses that any minister had God’s call, who had only a call from the heritors, or any other set of men : by which he excludes the whole ministers of the Church of Scotland, and himself among them, from having the call of God, the body of Christians having never been allowed to vote in the election of a minister.”

3. “ He charges our forefathers with a sinful silence or negligence.”

4. “ That he spoke disrespectfully of the act of Assembly, lodging the power of election in heritors and elders.”*

Mr Erskine requested that he might be favoured with a copy of the committee’s report, as he intended to prepare a written defence. This was denied him. It was with difficulty, and after a vote of the Synod, that he was permitted to obtain even a sight of it in the clerk’s hands.

When the Synod entered upon the consideration of the committee’s report, Mr Erskine read a paper containing answers to the above charges. In answer to the first charge, he said, “ This charge is not, and cannot be proven by any passages in my discourse ; for I know there is a great body of faithful ministers in the Church of Scotland, with whom I do not reckon myself worthy to be compared. As for the particulars alleged to support this charge, I shall only say,

* These extracts have been taken from “ *A Narrative of the procedure of the Judicatories of the Church of Scotland, with relation to Mr Ebenezer Erskine, and other ministers who have seceded from the said church:*” published by order of the General Assembly in 1739. The charges founded on these passages, and Mr Erskine’s answers to the charges, have been taken from the same official document. Of course, such an authority will be deemed sufficiently valid by all the friends of the Establishment, and in quoting it as one of my chief authorities, in giving an account of the origin of the Secession, I shall not be accused of undue partiality to Mr Erskine and his associates.

that I reckon it the duty of every faithful minister, when he is dispensing the pure truths of God, to exhort his hearers to make application of what is said to themselves ; and I do not think, that ministers themselves, when hearers of the word of God, are beyond such an exhortation. As for what I advanced with relation to the mistaken notions of the kingdom of Christ, ‘ which is not of this world,’ lying at the bottom of the evils and corruptions of the day : This I own as a truth, but do not think it proves the charge ; neither was it ever expressed by me with such a view.”

In answering the second charge, he stated, that the words, on which this charge was founded, were not given by the committee as they had been uttered by him in the pulpit, when delivering the discourse. The passage was to the following effect :—“ There is a twofold call necessary for a minister meddling as a builder in the church of God ; there is the call of God, and of his church. God’s call consists in his qualifying a man for the work, and in his inspiring him with a holy zeal and desire to employ these qualifications for the glory of God and the good of his church. The call of the church lies in the free call and election of the christian people. The promise of conduct and counsel in the choice of men that are to build, is not made to patrons, heritors, or any other set of men, but to the church, the body of Christ, to whom apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are given. As it is a natural privilege of every house or society of men, to have the choice of their own servants or officers, so it is the privilege of the house of God in a particular manner. What a miserable bondage would it be reckoned for any family to have stewards or servants imposed upon them by strangers, who might give the children a stone for bread, or a scorpion instead of a fish, poison instead of medicine ? And shall we suppose that ever God granted a power to any set of men, patrons, heritors, or whatever they be,—a power to impose servants on his family, without his own consent, they being the freest society in the world ?” In repelling the charge founded upon this passage, he said, “ I

adhere to my notes on this head, as the truths of God ; but deny they infer the charge of my looking upon all the ministers of this church as thieves and robbers ; for I know that a vast many of them have both God's call and the church's call : But as for these violent settlements that have taken place since the patronage act, I cannot think upon them as warranted by the word of God." " With regard to the remark, ' That the call of a minister ought not to be by the heritors or any other set of men ; and refused, that any minister had God's call, who had only a call from the heritors, by which he evidently excludes the whole ministers of the Church of Scotland, and himself among them, from having the call of God, the body of Christians having never been allowed to vote in the election of a minister,'—I answer, I own that the call of a minister ought not to be by heritors *as such* ; in regard that no such titles or distinctions of men are known in the kingdom of Christ ; the only heritors that are there are they that are *rich in faith*, they being heirs of the kingdom ; these are they that are precious in the sight of God, and honourable ; and I am of opinion, that, in dispensing the privileges of Christ's kingdom, we ought to put honour and value upon men, not upon the account of their worldly heritages, but as they are valuable in the sight of God, and as his image is to be found upon them." He farther added, on this point, " I think that I have good reason to refuse, that any minister has God's call, who has only a call from the heritors, *renitente et contradicente ecclesia* (with a reclaiming and an opposing congregation) ; yet, notwithstanding, I do not hereby exclude the whole ministers of the Church of Scotland, nor myself among them, from having the call of God, in regard, that from the Revolution till the act of patronage came to be in force, I know of no settlements but where the body of the Christian people concurred in the election of their minister ; and in the practice of the church, till of late, they were allowed to vote ; yea, to my certain knowledge, in the south of Scotland, presbyteries and other judicatories, with the christian people, wrestled jointly for

the settlement of congregations, in opposition to malignant and disaffected heritors.”

In reference to the third charge preferred against him, viz. having charged the forefathers of the Scottish Church with a sinful silence or negligence, he said, “ Although I have a very great regard for the instruments of our deliverance at the Revolution, particularly the godly ministers who survived the flood of persecuting tyranny, and my own father among the rest, yet I hope the reverend synod will excuse me, though I do not look upon these earthly ministers, or these that have succeeded them to this day, as infallible : But if the reverend synod can any where show this headship and sovereignty of his (of Christ), being asserted by any particular act of Assembly since the revolution, in opposition to these encroachments, I shall very willingly own my mistake ; but if not, I humbly move, that the reverend synod may address the ensuing Assembly for supplying that defect.”

In noticing the fourth charge above mentioned, concerning the remarks which he had made on the act of Assembly 1732, lodging the power of election in heritors and elders, he said,—“ I cannot, and dare not, retract my testimony against it, either before the Assembly, the day after it was passed into an act, or by what I said in my sermon before this reverend synod, in regard I cannot see the authority of the King of Zion giving warrant to confer the power of voting in the election of ministers, upon heritors, beyond other christians, especially when, in the said act, heritors disaffected to church and state were put upon a level with those of our own communion, and I shall be sorry if this act of our Assembly be made a term of our ministerial communion.”*

After the committee had presented their report, and Mr Erskine had been heard in reply to the statements which it contained, a keen and protracted debate ensued, which terminated in the synod finding (by a majority of six votes) Mr Erskine censurable for the expressions which he had

* Narrative of the Procedure, &c. p. 3-12.

uttered in his sermon. Against this sentence, Mr Alexander Moncrieff, minister at Abernethy, and Mr William Wilson, minister at Perth, with ten other ministers, and two ruling elders, protested. Mr Erskine, and his son-in-law, Mr James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven (who, on account of his relationship to Mr Erskine, was not permitted to vote), also protested, and appealed to the General Assembly.*

The synod followed up this decision by another, viz.—“ Rebuke Mr Erskine, and admonish him to behave orderly for the future ; and appoint the presbytery of Stirling to inquire anent his after-behaviour at their privy censures, and report to the next synod.” Mr Erskine, having retired from the house immediately after he had given in his protest, the rebuke could not be administered. The synod resolved to call him on the following day, and Mr Erskine not then appearing, they agreed to call him at their meeting in April, to be rebuked and admonished.†

When the synod met at Stirling, on the 12th of April 1733, this business was resumed. Of the twelve ministers who had protested at the former meeting, only seven were present ; and these gave in their reasons of dissent, in which they stated that, while they did not mean to vindicate every expression that Mr Erskine had used in his discourse, yet they thought that a distinction ought to be made betwixt the matter and the mode of his expressions. They farther declared, that the ground of their not acquiescing in the decision of the synod was, that it appeared to them, that the chief reason why the synod had pronounced a sentence of condemnation upon Mr Erskine, was his testifying against the act of 1732, which they considered to be equivalent to imposing a new term of ministerial communion, viz. that no minister shall be permitted, even in a discourse delivered before his brethren, to testify against any act, of the sinfulness of which he may be convinced. Notwithstanding the efforts made by Mr Erskine’s friends to get the matter amicably adjusted, the synod insisted on the rebuke being adminis-

* Gib’s Display, vol. i. p. 27.

† Narrative, p. 12.

tered, unless Mr Erskine should make some acknowledgment of the impropriety of the expressions which he had used. Mr Erskine, on the other hand, would not retract a single statement which he had made ; and, when called upon by the moderator, to receive the rebuke, he read a paper stating that he still adhered to his former protest, and that he was not convinced of having either said or done any thing that constituted a just ground of censure.* At this meeting, a petition was presented from several of the elders of Stirling, in favour of their minister ; but the committee of bills would not transmit it, and the synod refused to give it even a hearing.

At the meeting of the Assembly, in the month of May, only three of the protesters against the deed of synod appeared, viz. Messrs William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher. Mr Wilson and Mr Moncrieff pled that they might be heard at the bar of the Assembly, in support of their reasons of protest ; but, upon what grounds I am at a loss to conceive, this request was not granted. Mr Fisher also requested that he might be heard, but he too was refused a hearing by the Assembly.†

He had protested against the sentence of the synod, on the ground that it was not only prejudicial to Mr Erskine, but injurious to the truths of God's word ; but the committee of bills refused to transmit his reasons of appeal, arbitrarily pronouncing concerning his conduct, that he had intruded himself into the process, not so much for the sake of vindicating the truth, as on account of his connexion with Mr Erskine.

On the 14th of May, the Assembly entered on the consideration of Mr Erskine's protest. Mr Erskine appeared at the bar, attended by two advocates. Several members of synod appeared in support of the synod's sentence. After a variety of papers connected with the process had been read, and parties heard, the Assembly pronounced the following decision :—" The Assembly find the expressions vented by

* Gib's Display, vol. i. p. 404.

† Ibid, vol. i. p. 27.

Mr Erskine, and contained in the minutes of the synod's proceedings, with the answers thereto, made by him, to be offensive, and to tend to disturb the peace and good order of this church : therefore, they approve of the proceedings of the synod, and appoint him to be rebuked and admonished by the moderator, at their own bar, in order to terminate the process."* After this sentence was pronounced, the moderator, at the desire of the Assembly, gave thanks to the members of synod " for their care and diligence in this matter;" and, in terms of the sentence, he rebuked and admonished Mr Erskine from the chair.†

Mr Erskine declared that he could not submit, in silence, to the rebuke and admonition which had been tendered to him, as he was not convinced of having done any thing that deserved censure. He also presented a written protest against the sentence, to which the three brethren already mentioned subscribed an adherence, and he craved that the paper might be read, and recorded in the minutes of the Assembly. This paper was to the following effect :—

" Although I have a very great and dutiful regard to the judicatories of this church, to whom I own my subjection in the Lord ; yet, in respect the Assembly have found me censurable, and have tendered a rebuke and admonition to me, for things I conceive agreeable unto, and founded upon, the word of God, and our approven standards, I find myself obliged to protest against the said censure, as importing that I have, in my doctrine at the opening of the synod at Perth, October last, departed from the word of God, and the fore-said standards ; and that I shall be at liberty to preach the same truths of God, and to testify against the same or like defections of this church, upon all proper occasions. And I do hereby adhere unto the testimonies I have formerly emitted against the act of Assembly 1732, whether in the protest entered against it in open Assembly, or yet in my synodical sermon, craving this my protest and declaration to be

* Act 7th Assembly 1733.

† Narrative, &c. p. 43.

insert in the records of the Assembly, and that I may be allowed extracts thereof.

“ *May 14. 1733.*

EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

“ We, under subscribing ministers, dissenters from the sentence of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, do hereby adhere to the above protestation and declaration, containing a testimony against the act of Assembly 1732, and asserting our privilege and duty to testify publicly against the same or like defections, upon all proper occasions.

“ WILLIAM WILSON.

ALEX. MONCRIEFF.”

“ I Mr James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven, appellant against the sentence of the Synod of Perth, in this question, although the committee of bills did not think fit to transmit my reasons of appeal, find myself obliged to adhere unto the foresaid protestation and declaration.

“ JAMES FISHER.”

When Mr Erskine presented this paper, the Assembly would not permit it to be read. They urged upon him the irregularity and the danger of such a practice; and they insisted on his withdrawing the protest. This he refused to do; and having left the paper lying on the table, he and the three dissenting brethren left the Assembly.* Here the business would, in all probability have terminated, as it does not appear that, at this period, Mr Erskine, and the brethren who acted along with him, had any intention of leaving the communion of the national church. Notwithstanding the corruptions which prevailed in her, they still cherished toward her a filial affection. Connected with her, there was much which they regarded with veneration. Having been brought up within her pale, and having long enjoyed ministerial and christian intercourse with the men of worth and piety that were to be found in her bosom, their earliest and most pleasing associations must have pled powerfully

* Display, vol. i. p. 27.

with them on her behalf; and provided they were permitted to protest, when they saw cause, against the unconstitutional and unscriptural proceedings of the prevailing party; provided also they were permitted to testify in public against the corruptions that marred the beauty of their Zion, they were still willing to continue in her fellowship. But an overruling Providence had ordered it otherwise. These good men were driven violently onward, step by step, by the tyrannical measures of those who were opposed to them, until at length they were compelled formally to declare a secession from a church, which, with all its faults, they loved.

The paper which Mr Erskine threw down, before leaving the Assembly, was accidentally tossed over the table, and there it lay unheeded for some time, until a minister,* who was sitting beside the table picked it up, and, perusing the contents of it, his indignation was roused to its highest pitch. He immediately rose with a countenance flushed with anger, and insisted that the Assembly should stop their proceedings, and consider the insult which had been offered to them by such a paper having been laid upon their table. This appeal to their dignity had the effect which Mr Erskine's appeal to their justice had failed to produce, viz. causing the paper be read. Upon hearing the contents of it, the whole Assembly was in an uproar. A paper containing high treason against the sovereign, or blasphemy against the majesty of heaven, could not have called forth a greater burst of indignation. The officer was ordered to go in quest of the four brethren whose joint production had excited such an uproar, and to summon them to appear at the bar of the court next forenoon, to answer for such audacious conduct;†

* Mr Gib, in a manuscript note written by himself on a copy of the Display, says, that the person who picked up Mr Erskine's protest, and called the attention of the Assembly to it, was Mr James Nasmyth, minister at Dalmeny, "a fiery man (he adds) in the corrupt measures of that time."

† Such is the account given by one who was an eye witness of the whole transaction, viz. Mr Adam Gib. He was then a student at the University of Edinburgh, and for some years was a regular attendant upon the meetings of the General Assembly; and it was the disgust which he received from

and in the mean time, a committee was appointed to consider the protests, and to report to the Assembly what was most befitting to be done in this extraordinary case.

Next forenoon, the ministers, in compliance with the summons, appeared in the court, and before any farther measures were adopted, a committee was appointed to retire with the offending brethren, and to endeavour to persuade them to withdraw their paper, but without effect; the ministers declared that their minds were fully made up, and that they were firmly resolved to adhere. The committee having given in their report, the Assembly, by a great majority, adopted the following overture, which their committee had prepared:—"The General Assembly ordains, that the four brethren appear before the Commission in August next, and then show their sorrow for their conduct and misbehaviour, in offering to protest, and in giving in to this Assembly the paper by them subscribed, and that they then retract the same. And in case they do not appear before the said Commission in August, and then show their sorrow, and retract, as said is, the Commission is hereby empowered and appointed to suspend the said brethren, or such of them as shall not obey, from the exercise of their ministry. And, further, in case the said brethren shall be suspended by the said Commission, and that they shall act contrary to the said sentence of suspension, the Commission is hereby empowered and appointed, at their meeting in November, or any subsequent meeting, to proceed to a higher censure against the said four brethren, or such of them as shall continue to offend by transgressing this act. And the General Assembly do appoint the several presbyteries, of which the said brethren are members, to report to the Commission in August, and subsequent meetings of it, their conduct and behaviour with respect to this act."*

contemplating their proceedings previously to this period, that led him, in the winter of 1732, to renounce his connexion with the Established Church, even before the Secession commenced.—*Display*, vol. i. p. 29.

* Minutes of Assembly, 1733.

After this sentence was pronounced, the brethren attempted to read a short paper which they had prepared as a declaration of their joint sentiments, but when they commenced reading it, the Assembly ordered their officer to remove them. The substance of their declaration was as follows:—
“ In regard the venerable Assembly have come to a positive sentence, without hearing our defences, and have appointed the Commission to execute their sentence in August, in case we do not retract what we have done ; we cannot but complain of this uncommon procedure, and declare that we are not at liberty to take this affair to an *avisandum*.” Not being permitted to read this paper, they left it on the table, under a protest, and withdrew.*

It may well be supposed, that such proceedings as these could not take place without exciting a great ferment throughout the country. The imperious conduct of the Assembly, the high popularity of the ministers who had been censured, and the firmness which they displayed in vindicating their own privileges, as well as in asserting the scriptural rights of the people, drew toward them the good wishes of a large portion of the most pious part of the community. All eyes were now turned toward the meeting of the Commission in August, as upon its proceedings depended, in a great measure, the future integrity or disruption of the Scottish Church.

When the Commission met, the four brethren appeared before them, having previously prepared written defences. Upon their appearance at the bar, the Commission intimated to them, that they had resolved not to read any papers that might be presented by them, either severally or conjunctly, and that they must answer such questions as were proposed to them *separately* and *viva voce*. In reply to this intimation, the brethren stated, that they were all included in the condemnatory sentence of the Assembly, that their cause was one and the same, and that they insisted upon their right of choosing whether they should make their defence by *word* or by *writ*. They then presented, under form

* A Testimony to the Doctrine, Worship, &c., p. 12.

of instrument, two representations, one by Mr Erskine and Mr Fisher, as appellants from the sentence of the synod of Perth and Stirling, and another by Mr Wilson and Mr Moncrieff, as protesters against that sentence. The Commission, disregarding these representations, and adhering to their resolution, commanded all the brethren to retire, except Mr Erskine; and they forthwith proceeded to interrogate him. He was asked, whether he was sorry for protesting against the authority of the last Assembly, and if he now retracted his protests? To which he replied, "He was indeed sorry that what he had done should be interpreted by any as a contempt of the authority of the judicatories of this church, no such thing being intended by his protest, but only a solemn adherence to the truths of God delivered in his synodical sermon, for the emitting of which he had been rebuked and admonished solemnly at the Assembly's bar, as though he had vented some notorious error or heresy. And with respect to the question now proposed, whether he retracted his protestation, he and his three brethren had had that matter under their serious consideration ever since the last Assembly, and accordingly had drawn up their deliberate answers in writ, which were now lying upon the table, and therefore craved they might be read." The Moderator told him, that the Commission had resolved to read none of their papers, but that they must answer the above question *viva voce*. Mr Erskine replied, "That he judged it the privilege of any man sisted before a court, civil or ecclesiastical, to choose which of the ways he thought proper for his own defence, whether by word or writ; and that they being a body of men joined together in the same cause, had agreed upon their joint written and subscribed answers; and, for his own part, he did not incline to give up this privilege, and therefore again referred to his written answer." He was then asked, whether his paper was a retraction of his protest or not; His reply was, "That the court was abundantly capable to judge upon their reading his answer."*

* Preface to the Representations of Eben. Erskine, &c., p. iv.

After some time had been spent to no purpose, in urging Mr Erskine to retract his protest, and to acknowledge his sorrow for his conduct, he was removed ; and a debate then ensued whether or not the representation, which had been given in by him and Mr Fisher, should be read. In this instance, the Commission showed that their decrees were not, like those of the Medes and Persians, unalterable, for it was decided, by a great majority, that the paper should be read. Mr Erskine was again called in, and permitted to read his representation ; and after having done so, he laid it upon the table. The Commission desired him to take it with him, but he refused, stating, that as he had presented it under a protest, it was necessary that it should be engrossed in the process, for the vindication of himself and of his brethren.

The following is the account which Mr Gib gives of this scene :—" I saw," says he, " Mr Ebenezer Erskine then standing at the bar in a most easy and undaunted, yea, majestic appearance, amidst warm and brow-beating reasonings against the refusal which he then made, particularly by the Earl of Isla. Before the Commission found themselves obliged to reverse their forenoon's resolution against receiving any written answers to their question, and before what is narrated in the preface to the representations, a proposal was agreed in for allowing him to read such parts of his representation as contained a direct answer to their question. The paper being then handed over to him, he entered upon the reading of it, beginning with the address and title. The Moderator immediately stopped him, telling him that he was to read only such parts as contained a direct answer to the question. Mr Erskine replied, that these would come in due order. This produced new reasonings, which issued in his being allowed to read the whole paper ; and he did so in a very deliberate manner, and with a very audible voice : Mr Archibald Rennie, who was next year intruded into the parish of Muckhart, holding the candle to him, as it was then late."*

* MS. note written by Mr Gib on a copy of the Display.

Mr Fisher was then called to the bar, and the question was proposed to him, If he was sorry for his conduct in adhering to the protest given in by Mr Ebenezer Erskine to the last General Assembly, and if he would now retract the same? To which he replied, “Although I sincerely declare that I do not design, by the protestation given in against the decision of the last Assembly, to impugn the power and authority of the General Assembly to censure any of the ministers and members of this church, upon just and relevant grounds, or the exercise of that power and authority according to the word of God, and the known principles of this church; yet I am not sensible of any just ground of offence I have given by my conduct before the last Assembly, and therefore cannot declare my sorrow for it, nor retract the said protestation; but find it my duty to adhere thereunto, and to the papers given in this day under form of instrument.” *

Mr Wilson and Mr Moncrieff were next interrogated, as to their willingness to withdraw their protest, and express their sorrow; when they referred to their signed representation, as containing their answer, and craved that it might be read. Instead of granting this request, the Commission appointed a committee to meet with Mr Erskine and his friends, with the view of bringing them, if possible, to a more submissive state of mind.† After a conference of two or three hours, the committee reported, that the brethren refused to retract their protest, or to declare their sorrow for the same;—and the Moderator having inquired at Mr Wilson and Mr Moncrieff, if they agreed to the truth of said report, they answered in the affirmative. The Commission, considering this a sufficient answer to the question which they at first proposed, refused to hear these two brethren

* Minutes of the Commission.

† This committee consisted of the following persons :—The Moderator, Principal Campbell, Principal Smith, Principal Hadow, Mr John Matheson, Mr Mathew Connel, Mr James Nasmyth, and Mr John Orr, ministers; the Lord Advocate, Lord Grange, Lord Dunmore, Mr Solicitor Erskine, and Mr James Boswell of Auchinleck, ruling elders.

read their representation ; but allowed them to state, *viva voce*, any reasons they might have for refusing to withdraw their protest. Having made their statement, they concluded with the following declaration, in which they were joined by Mr Erskine and Mr Fisher ;—“ That any sentence of suspension, or of a higher nature, that should be inflicted upon them, should be held and reputed as *null and void* in itself ; and that it should be lawful and warrantable for them to exercise their ministry as hitherto they had done, and as if no such censure had been inflicted upon them, in regard they were not convicted of departing from any of the received principles of this church, or of counteracting their ordinary vows and engagements ; but, on the contrary, were sentenced to censure by the late General Assembly, for protesting against a decision whereby injury was done to some truths of God, which they were obliged to own and confess ; and whereby they were brought under *new and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion*, inconsistent with the word of God, and their ordination vows and engagements.”*

Petitions were presented to the Commission from the presbyteries of Stirling, Dunblane, and Ellon ; also from the Magistrates, Town-councils, and Kirk-sessions of Perth and Stirling, craving a delay of the execution of the Assembly’s sentence against Mr Erskine and his friends : but the Commission refused to hear these petitions, because they did not consider that the parties presenting them had any proper interest in the question. A considerable number of the Commission were for delay, but the majority insisted that the sentence of the Assembly was peremptory, and that they had no option left them, in the circumstances of the case, but to carry it into effect. After some discussion, a vote was stated, *Suspend the four protesting brethren from the exercise of the ministerial functions, and all the parts thereof*, or, *Delay this affair?* It carried, *Suspend*. From this de-

* A Testimony to the Doctrine, &c. p. 15.

cision several members of Commission, both ministers and elders, dissented.*

The four brethren were then called to the bar, and the sentence of *Suspension* was intimated to them, when they gave in the following protestation :—“ We hereby adhere to the protestations taken by us before this court, for ourselves, and in the name of all the ministers, elders, and members of the Church of Scotland, and of all and every one in our respective congregations, adhering to us ; bearing, that this sentence is in itself null and void ; and that it shall be lawful and warrantable for us to exercise our ministry, as hitherto we have done, and as if no such censure had been inflicted : And that, if, in consequence of this sentence, any minister or probationer shall exercise any part of our pastoral work, the same shall be held and reputed as a violent intrusion upon our ministerial labours. And we do hereby protest for extracts of the papers given in by us, and of the whole of the Commission’s procedure against us ; and hereupon we take instruments.

“ EBENEZER ERSKINE.

WILLIAM WILSON.

ALEXR. MONCRIEFF.

JAMES FISHER.”

The harsh and imperious treatment, which these good men received ; first from the Assembly and next from the Commission, excited a strong feeling of sympathy in their favour. If they were popular before, the usage which they had received made them still more so. Not only their sessions and flocks clung to them with a most affectionate attachment, but several synods and presbyteries lifted up their voice on their behalf. The Assembly had ordered, that, if they did not obey the sentence of the Commission, suspending them

* The names of those who dissented were, Mr Henry Lindsay, Mr Alexander Wardrop, and Mr James M’Garroch, ministers ; Colonel John Erskine of Carnock, Mr Alexander Bruce of Kennet, and Mr Albert Munro of Coull, ruling elders.

from the exercise of their office, the Commission should, at their next meeting in November, inflict upon them a higher censure. This meeting, therefore, was looked forward to with great anxiety, as the suspended brethren had, by virtue of their protest, continued to exercise their ministry as formerly. On the 14th of November, the Commission again met. So great was the interest excited among the inhabitants of Edinburgh, that long before the hour of meeting, the doors leading to the Assembly Aisle were beset by crowds of people anxious to obtain admission; and it was not till the magistrates interfered, that the members could find an entrance. Mr Erskine and his three friends, in compliance with the summons which they had received, presented themselves at the bar of the Commission, and were about to read a paper, when they were interrupted. The paper was then laid on the table, and was to the following effect:—

“Edinburgh, November 14th, 1733.—We do hereby protest, that our present appearance before the Commission shall not be construed a falling from the declarations we emitted, and the protestations entered, both before and after the executing of the sentence of suspension against us by the Commission, at their meeting in August last: To which protestations and representations, given in by us to the said Commission, we still adhere; and hereupon take instruments.

“EBENEZER ERSKINE.

WILLIAM WILSON.

ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.

JAMES FISHER.”

A committee was appointed to converse with the brethren, and to induce them to retract their protest.* In the afternoon the committee reported that they had been unsuccessful.

* This committee consisted of the following persons:—The Moderator, Principal Smith, Principal Chalmers, Professor Crawford, Mr John Methven, Mr James Mackie, Mr James Mercer, Mr James Robertson, Mr Robert Bell, and Mr James Walker, ministers; the Lord Advocate, Mr Solicitor Erskine, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Conservator, and Mr Robert Craigie, ruling elders.

ful in their endeavours, and that the brethren were still resolved to adhere. The protesting ministers were then asked, *If they had obeyed the sentence of the Commission in August last suspending them from the exercise of their ministry?* They all replied, *That they had not.* That as they had protested, both before and after the said sentence of suspension was executed upon them, that it should be held and reputed null and void, for the reasons contained in their several representations; so they had exercised all the parts of their ministerial office, as if they had been under no such censure.

At this meeting of the Commission, no fewer than seven synods sent up communications in favour of the suspended ministers.* Six of them craved that the Commission would delay proceeding to a higher censure, and one of them pled, that the ministers might be treated with tenderness and lenity. Petitions to a similar effect were presented from the presbyteries of Dornoch and Aberdeen. The latter of these presbyteries did not hesitate to tell the Commission, “That they judged the sentence of suspension, inflicted upon the foresaid ministers, was too high, and that it was a stretching of church authority.” These representations and petitions were supported by a considerable number of the members of Commission, who insisted strongly for delay, and argued that the sentence of the Assembly did not make it imperative on them to proceed to a higher censure at this meeting. With the view of determining this point, a vote was stated, *Proceed immediately to inflict a higher censure upon the four suspended ministers, or, Delay the same till March?* When the roll was called, the votes were found to be equal; and Mr John Gowdie, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, being moderator, turned the scale against Mr Erskine and his friends,

* These synods were the following :—Dumfries, Moray, Ross, Angus and Mearns, Perth and Stirling, Galloway and Fife. The number of Synods connected with the Church of Scotland, is fifteen; and it shows us in what light the sentence of the Commission, suspending the four brethren from the exercise of their ministry, was viewed by their own church, when nearly one half of the synods presented petitions in their favour.

by giving the casting vote in favour of those who were for proceeding to inflict a higher censure. This decision fixed the fate of the four brethren ; for their friends in the Commission, finding that their efforts on their behalf were unavailing, did not urge the matter farther ; several of them, by marking their dissent, declared that they were free from the evil consequences that might result from such a decision.* Mr Ralph Erskine, minister at Dunfermline, and Mr Thomas Mair, minister at Orwell, presented a paper, with their names affixed to it, declaring that they adhered to the representations which were formerly given in by the four ministers, condemning the harsh measures which were pursued toward them, and protesting that it would be competent for them to hold ministerial and christian communion with them, notwithstanding any censure that might be inflicted on them by the Commission.

Before the Commission proceeded to inflict the threatened censure, it was moved, on the second day of their meeting, that another committee be appointed to converse with the protesting brethren. This was readily enough agreed to by both parties ; and, accordingly, a long conference took place, which lasted from 6 till 10 o'clock in the evening. At this meeting, the following proposal was made by the committee to the ministers, as the basis of an amicable adjustment of the question at issue betwixt them :—" If the next General Assembly shall declare, that it was not meant by the act of the last Assembly, to deny or take away the privilege and duty of ministers to testify against defections, then we shall be at liberty, and willing to withdraw our protest against the said act of Assembly ; and particularly, we reserve to ourselves the liberty of testifying against the act of Assembly 1732, on all proper occasions." This proposal being new to the brethren, they requested that they might be allowed to

* The members of the Commission who dissented were, Mr Henry Lindsay, Mr ——— Lawson, Mr Hector M'Kenzie, Mr Peter Pilmore, and Mr Alexander Wardrop, ministers ; the Lord Grange, and Colonel Erskine, ruling elders.

retire for a little, to consider it before they gave their answer ; but the committee desired them to take it into their consideration till the next morning, which they consented to do, with the express declaration that their reason for doing so was, that it was late, and that they did not at the time fully understand the import of it.

On the following morning, they gave in their answer to the committee, in writing, which was as follows :—“ As to the proposal made by the committee to us, that we should withdraw our protestation, in case a subsequent Assembly should declare that it was not meant by the act and sentence of the last Assembly, in Mr Erskine’s affair, to deny or take away the privilege and duty of ministers to testify against defections. After serious and mature deliberation, we have no freedom to go into the said proposal, and that because the obvious sense and meaning of the said act and sentence appears to us to lay a restraint on ministerial freedom and faithfulness, in testifying against the act of Assembly 1732, and the like defections in this church, upon proper occasions ; and, as this was the ground of our protestation, so any declaration that a subsequent Assembly can make, cannot remove the ground upon which we protested against that decision, in regard that an act and declaration of the following Assembly, though agreeable to the word of God, can never take away the ground of protesting against a wrong decision of a preceding Assembly.”

The committee having reported that they had not been able to make any impression upon the four brethren ; that they continued as obstinate as ever, the commission proceeded, agreeably to their former decisions, to inflict upon them a higher censure. It was agreed that the following should be the state of the question :—“ *Loose the relation of the said four ministers to their several charges, and declare them no longer ministers of this church, and prohibit all ministers of this church to employ them in any ministerial function ; or, Depose them simpliciter ?*” And the votes being taken, it

carried *Loose* by a great majority.* “And therefore the Commission of the General Assembly did, and hereby do, loose the relation of Mr Ebenezer Erskine, minister at Stirling; Mr William Wilson, minister at Perth; Mr Alexander Moncrieff, minister at Abernethy; and Mr James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven, to their said respective charges; and do declare them no longer ministers of this church; and do hereby prohibit all ministers of this church to employ them, or any of them, in any ministerial function. And the Commission do declare the churches of the said Mr Erskine, Mr Wilson, Mr Moncrieff, and Mr Fisher, vacant from and after the date of this sentence; and appoint that letters from the moderator, and extracts of this sentence, be sent to the several presbyteries within whose bounds the said ministers have had their charges, appointing them, as they are hereby appointed, to cause intimate this sentence in the foresaid several churches, now declared vacant, any time betwixt and the 1st of January next; and also that notice of this sentence be sent, by letters from the moderator of this Commission, to the magistrates of Perth and Stirling, to the sheriff-principal of Perth, and baillie of the regality of Abernethy.”† And the Commission further agreed to declare that, “in case the said Mr Ebenezer Erskine, Mr Wilson, Mr Moncrieff, and Mr Fisher, shall behave themselves dutifully and submissively to this sentence, and shall make application to the meeting of the Commission, in March next, and give satisfaction to them, the Commission will then recommend them for favour to the next General Assembly.”

Such was the sentence which the Commission recorded in their journal,—a sentence which would not have disgraced the Star Chamber, or the High Court of Commission, when in the zenith of their power. Against this sentence, Mr Gabriel Wilson, minister at Maxton, entered the following

* The greatness of the majority was owing to Mr Erskine’s friends not being at liberty to vote either *Loose* or *Depose*, on account of their having previously voted against proceeding to inflict a higher censure.

† Minutes of the Commission.

protest :—" *Edinburgh, November 16, 1733.*—I, Mr Gabriel Wilson, minister at Maxton, in mine own name, and in name of all those that shall adhere to me, protest against this sentence of the Commission, in the case of the four brethren ; and that it may be lawful for me to complain of the said sentence, and of the several acts of Assembly that have occasioned the same, to any subsequent Assembly of the Church of Scotland. As also, that it may be lawful for me, in a becoming manner, on all proper occasions, to bear testimony against the same, with all other defections and severities of this church in her sentences : and, finally, that I may, in the mean time, as in providence I shall find opportunity, hold ministerial communion with my said dear brethren, as if no such sentence had been passed against them. Upon all which, I take instruments in the clerk's hands.

" GABRIEL WILSON."

To this protest the following ministers adhered :—Mr Ralph Erskine, minister at Dunfermline ; Mr Thomas Mair, minister at Orwell ; Mr John M'Laren, minister at Edinburgh ; Mr John Currie, minister at Kinglassie ; Mr James Wardlaw, minister at Dunfermline ; and Mr Thomas Nairn, minister at Abbotshall. .

When Mr Erskine, and the other three brethren were called in, and had the sentence intimated to them by the moderator, they read the following paper ; and, after reading it, they left it in the hands of the clerk, under a protest that it might be engrossed in the minutes.*

" *Edinburgh, November 16, 1733.*—We do hereby adhere to the protestations formerly entered before this court, both at their last meeting in August, and when we appeared first before this meeting. And further, we do protest, in our own name, and in the name of all and every one in our respective congregations adhering to us, that, notwithstanding of this sentence passed against us, our pastoral relation shall be held and reputed firm and valid. And likewise we do protest, that,

It was not engrossed.

notwithstanding of our being cast out from ministerial communion with the Established Church of Scotland, we still hold communion with all and every one who desire, with us, to adhere to the principles of the true presbyterian, covenanted Church of Scotland, in her doctrine, worship, government, and discipline; and particularly with every one who is groaning under the evils, and who are afflicted with the grievances we have been complaining of; who are, in their several spheres, wrestling against the same. But in regard the prevailing party in this Established Church, who have now cast us out from ministerial communion with them, are carrying on a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles; and, particularly, are suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness in testifying against the present backslidings of the church, and inflicting censures upon ministers for witnessing, by protestations and otherwise, against the same. Therefore we do, for these and many other weighty reasons to be laid open in due time, protest, that we are obliged to make a SECESSION from them, and that we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them. And, in like manner, we do protest, that it shall be lawful and warrantable for us to exercise the Keys of Doctrine, Discipline, and Government, according to the word of God, and Confession of Faith, and the principles and constitutions of the Church of Scotland, as if no such censure had been passed upon us: Upon all which we take instruments. And we hereby appeal unto the first free, faithful, and reforming General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

“ EBENEZER ERSKINE.

WILLIAM WILSON.

ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.

JAMES FISHER.”

Here is a formal declaration made of a Secession, not from the Church of Scotland, as such, but from the *prevailing party* in that church, who for some time past had been pur-

suing measures that were equally opposed to the dictates of Scripture and of sound policy. Whatever the intentions of the leaders of this party might be, there can be no doubt that the tendency of the measures which they pursued was to secularize the church, to convert it into a mere engine of State, to banish vital godliness from its precincts, and to extinguish every thing like independence of thought, as well as freedom of action, amongst both ministers and people. The despotic nature of their decrees, and the determined spirit which they manifested in carrying them into effect, however violent and just the opposition that might be made to them, had excited, throughout a wide circle, indignation and disgust; and matters were now come to that crisis, that either a resolute stand must be made for the truth, on Scriptural grounds, whatever might be the consequences; or conscience and freedom of judgment must be surrendered, by tamely submitting, on all occasions, to tyrannical and unjust enactments. It was the former of these alternatives which the Fathers of the Secession adopted. They had calmly and deliberately surveyed the ground which they meant to occupy. They had, before putting on the harness, counted the cost: and, however fondly attached they might be to the national church, and however much they might love and revere many of her members, with whom they were still desirous to hold communion, yet they were resolved that they would not, on any account, passively acquiesce in measures which their soul abhorred, as dishonouring to God and destructive of religion, and against which they were forbidden, by stern authority, to lift a condemnatory voice. The cause of their Master was dearer to them than any worldly consideration: In the maintenance of it, they were prepared to give up their livings, and to renounce their dearest connexions; by it they were resolved, like faithful servants, to stand or fall.

It will be proper, at this stage of the narrative, to pause, and take a review of the proceedings of the Assembly and Commission toward these intrepid men; that we may see

how harsh and unjust was the treatment which they received, and what good grounds they had for withdrawing from the communion of a church, where they had imposed upon them the painful alternative, either of silently submitting to the grossest abuses, or of being subjected, on account of their fidelity, to the severest censures.

Mr Ebenezer Erskine, and the other Fathers of the Secession who acted along with him, have been frequently represented as factious demagogues, as violent schismatics, as turbulent, discontented men, whose ruling passion was a love of popularity, and who abandoned the national church, that they might gratify their ambition by being at the head of a new sect. Nothing can be farther from the truth than the view that has been thus given of the character and motives of these excellent men. Such a charge could originate only in ignorance of their history, or in a wilful misrepresentation of the circumstances in which the Secession commenced. Mr Erskine and his friends did not at first *voluntarily* leave the Church of Scotland: they *were driven out* of her communion. A sentence was pronounced against them, declaring that their relation with the national church was dissolved. On what ground? Because they entered their protest against what they deemed an unrighteous sentence of the General Assembly; and because they refused to withdraw their protest when the Assembly desired them to do so. On this single ground were they expelled from a church, to whose principles and constitution they were conscientiously attached, and on which they reflected honour, both by their talents and by their piety. That the sentence which the synod of Perth pronounced against Mr Erskine, when they found him censurable on account of certain expressions used by him in his synod sermon, was unjust, few will now be inclined to question. Neither the synod nor the Assembly who afterwards affirmed the sentence, ventured to hint that the sentiments contained in the obnoxious passages were unscriptural, or opposed to the standards of their church. All that they affirmed concerning them was, that they *impugned*

several acts of Assembly, and tended to disturb the peace and good order of the church ; and even this was an arbitrary construction which they put upon the passages,—a construction which Mr Erskine himself disclaimed, and which would not have suggested itself to any individual who was not listening to the discourse under the influence of party-feeling. That there were pointed allusions in the sermon to the practice, which had become so prevalent, of violently intruding ministers upon reclaiming congregations, and to the infringement of the rights of the people by the act of 1732, which had been so unconstitutionally passed, Mr Erskine did not deny. In bearing testimony against these and similar abuses, he considered that he was doing nothing more than his duty ; and no occasion could be more fitting for expressing his sentiments upon these points, than when his brethren were assembled in their synod to deliberate concerning the affairs of the church. Besides, if any apology were necessary for the ministerial freedom which he exercised on this occasion, it ought to be remembered, that the supreme court had refused to receive any representations on the subject of the prevailing corruptions, and had prohibited the entering of dissents and protests upon their record against their own proceedings, however unscriptural and unconstitutional these might be ; so that faithful ministers were reduced to the alternative, either of appearing to sanction, by their silence, the grossest abuses, or of letting their voice be heard against them in the pulpit.

This, then, constituted the whole amount of Mr Erskine's alleged offence, that he ventured to hint at certain abuses which had crept into the church ; and, in a particular manner, that he presumed to pronounce unscriptural the mode of electing ministers which the General Assembly had sanctioned. For being thus honest and courageous in the expression of his sentiments was he declared to be deserving of public censure. Mr Erskine showed his respect for the authority of the supreme court so far, that he received the rebuke and admonition when they were tendered to him ;

but immediately after, he laid a protest upon the table in which he declared, that notwithstanding such a sentence having been pronounced, he was at liberty to preach the same truths of God, that he had already preached, and to testify against the same or similar defections of the church on all proper occasions. In this protest he was joined by his three friends, who considered the sentence pronounced against him as unjust in itself, and as imposing a restraint upon ministerial faithfulness. So averse were these men to leave the church, and so great was their dread of being accounted schismatics, that notwithstanding the treatment which Mr Erskine had received, and the many corruptions which prevailed, they were quite willing to have remained in her communion, and to have acted under their protest, provided they had been permitted to do so. But the Assembly peremptorily ordered them to withdraw their protest, and to express their sorrow for having offered it, under penalty of being dealt with as obstinate offenders. To this mandate they could not conscientiously submit: and because they would not make a surrender of their consciences, nor consent to have their mouths gagged, were they first suspended from the exercise of their office, and finally driven from their charges altogether. Who would not have felt themselves aggrieved had they been subjected to such treatment? Who, possessed of the common feelings of men, would not have entered their solemn protest against such proceedings, as oppressive and unjust?

It was in such circumstances as these, that the Fathers of the Secession declared that they could no longer hold communion with men, who, for a series of years, had trampled upon the rights of their fellow christians, by imposing ministers on congregations in the face of the most determined opposition; who had shown themselves the patrons of corruptions and abuse; who had spread the shield of their protection over an individual who had been twice convicted of the grossest heresy,* and who had stretched ecclesiastical

* Professor Simson.

authority to its utmost pitch, that by means of it they might crush those who had the honesty and the courage to oppose their measures. In reference to this party in the Church of Scotland, who at that time bore the ascendancy, their language was, “ *We are obliged to make a Secession from them, and we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them.*”

While they publicly announced a Secession from *the prevailing party* in the church, they declared their adherence to the principles of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, to the doctrine, government, discipline, and worship recognised in her standards; they professed, at the same time, a warm attachment to those good men who remained within her pale, and who, like themselves, were struggling to vindicate her liberty, and to promote her purity; and they declared that they were willing to hold with all such both ministerial and christian communion. As it is important for my readers to know the exact ground which the founders of the Secession occupied, when they withdrew from the national church, and the views and feelings with which they took this important step, I shall permit them to state these in their own language. The following extract is from a document published by them, immediately after the Secession commenced, and entitled, “ *A Testimony to the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland, &c.*”

“ We own (say they) that Secession from ministerial communion with such as bear the character and office of ministers of the gospel, ought to proceed upon weighty and important grounds; yet, as it cannot be refused that a Secession from ministerial communion with such has been found in some cases both *necessary* and *justifiable*, so we hope it will be evident to such as consider the matter without partiality and prejudice, that our *present Secession* is both *warrantable* and *necessary*: Our protestations doth limit and circumscribe the same; and it plainly characteriseth them from whom it is made. Our Secession is not from the

Church of Scotland ; we own her doctrine contained in her Confession of Faith ; we adhere to her covenanted presbyterian church government, discipline, and worship : Neither is our Secession from those who are cleaving unto our covenanted principles, and who are affected with the grievances we complain of, and are in their several spheres wrestling against the same ; but it is from a party who have got the management in their hands, and who have got the majority on their side in the Judicatories, particularly in our Assemblies and Commissions, and who are *carrying on a course of defection* from our reformed and covenanted principles, and who are *suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness* in testifying against their present backslidings by inflicting censures upon ministers for witnessing by protestation and otherwise against the same.”*

From the preceding statements it must appear obvious to every unprejudiced reader, that the Secession did not originate in a factious spirit, and that the charge of schism can by no means apply to the venerable men with whom it commenced. They were *thrust out* of the church, at a time when they had no intention of leaving it ; and being thus thrust out, they were placed, in the providence of God, in such circumstances that, as they themselves express it, they *were obliged to make a Secession* from the men who had treated them with such harshness and injustice, and who were pursuing a system of measures that tended to the overthrow of vital godliness.† Their chief guilt, in the estimation of

* Testimony, &c. p. 45.

† Mr Wilson, in his excellent Defence, says, p. 40, “ It was not violent intrusions, it was not the Act 1732, neither was it any other particular step of defection, considered abstractly and by themselves, upon which the Secession was stated ; but a complex course of defection, both in doctrine, government, and discipline, carried on with a high hand by the present judicatories of this church, justifying themselves in their procedure, and refusing to be reclaimed.” Again, observes the same writer (p. 34 of the Continuation of his Defence), “ The case stands thus with the Seceding ministers ; they were formerly in ecclesiastical communion with the present judicatories, and they tried all means that lay in their power, and which they thought proper, for stopping the current of defection ; they joined in presbyterial instructions to

those who displayed such violence against them, was their *faithfulness*. They considered it their duty to lift their warning voice against existing evils, that they might stem, if possible, the torrent of corruption : and because they would not forego this privilege, and keep silence at the bidding of the hirelings of the State, they were, by an unjust sentence, declared to be no longer ministers of the Church of Scotland. The Assembly, as we shall afterwards see, made an attempt to repair the injury which their Commission had done, by virtue of their authority. But it was too late. The Seceders had taken their ground, and they were resolved to maintain it, until they should have some better security given than any that was offered to them, that the ruling party would retrace their steps, and pursue, for the future, such measures as should tend to promote the glory of God, and advance the interests of religion.

the several Assemblies ; they tried petitions, representations, and doctrinal testimonies ; they tried dissents and protestations for their exoneration ; they continued testifying after this manner, till the judicatories thrust some of them out from their communion."

CHAPTER II.

The four brethren met at Gairney Bridge. The Associate Presbytery formed. Reasons assigned for its formation. First Testimony published. Summary of its contents. Articles of belief published by the presbytery. Popularity of the seceding ministers. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1734. Act authorizing the restoration of the four brethren to their charges. Remarks on this act of Assembly. Meeting of the synod of Perth and Stirling in July 1734. The sentence pronounced by the Commission against the four brethren reversed. The brethren refuse to return to the national church. Reasons for their refusal. Their conduct vindicated. Meeting of the General Assembly in 1735. The Associate Presbytery agree to proceed to acts of jurisdiction. Applications for sermon made to the presbytery from the parishes of Muckhart and Kinross. Confession of sin made by the brethren of the Presbytery to one another. General Assembly of 1736. Professor Campbell of St Andrews. Convicted of error. No censure inflicted. Messrs Wilson and Fisher visit the west of Scotland. Introduction of the Secession into Ireland. Mr Wilson elected Professor of Divinity by the Associate Presbytery. Publication of the Judicial Testimony. Attacked by Mr Currie of Kinglassie. Defended by Mr Wilson. Porteous riot. Captain Porteous hanged by the populace. Seceding ministers accused by the Duke of Argyle of being concerned in this business. Porteous act. Condemned by the Seceding ministers.

AFTER the sentence of the Commission had been pronounced against Mr Erskine and his three friends, loosing the relation betwixt them and their respective congregations, and declaring them no longer ministers of the national church, these brethren agreed, before they left Edinburgh, to hold a meeting for the purpose of deliberating what course they

would pursue in the circumstances in which they were now placed. Agreeably to this appointment, they met at Gairney Bridge, in the neighbourhood of Kinross, on the 5th December 1733. Two other brethren, Messrs Ralph Erskine and Thomas Mair, met along with them. This was a most solemn and important meeting ; and the memorable consequences which have resulted from it, entitle it to hold a high place in the reverential regard of every friend of the Secession. The good men who assembled on this occasion felt the delicacy of the situation in which they were placed ; they were also deeply sensible of the importance of the trust reposed in them as ministers of the gospel. The proceedings of the Assembly and of the Commission, in reference to them, had excited an extraordinary interest in the country ; and they were well aware, that the eyes of a considerable portion of the pious were directed toward them, to see how they would act in the present emergency. In these circumstances, they avoided every thing that might have the appearance of rashness or precipitancy. They considered it due to themselves, and to the cause in which they were embarked, to observe the utmost caution. Before taking a single step, they pondered well the necessity of it, and the probable consequences that would result from it. Accordingly, when they met at Gairney Bridge, they did not hastily come to a determination what course they would adopt. They continued in prayer and in serious deliberation for two days ; and having thus frequently implored the divine direction, and having maturely weighed all the circumstances of the case, they finally resolved to form themselves into a presbytery, under the designation of *The Associate Presbytery*. Mr Ebenezer Erskine was requested to constitute them with prayer, when he was afterwards chosen Moderator. Mr James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven, was appointed clerk, and took the oath *de fide*li.*

* The members of the Associate Presbytery, at its first formation, were Mr Ebenezer Erskine, minister of Stirling ; Mr William Wilson, minister at Perth ; Mr Alexander Moncrieff, minister at Abernethy ; and Mr James

The reasons which influenced them in taking this decisive step, were the following : They considered that, by forming themselves into a presbytery, they were following up the design of their protestation before the Commission, in which they declared, that, notwithstanding the sentence which had been pronounced, they were at liberty to exercise the key of discipline and government, and all the functions of the ministerial office. By thus uniting together *in collegio*, they were acting more in consistency with their professed principles as presbyterians, than if they should act separately, and independently of one another. They farther conceived, that the state of the Established Church was such as to require prompt and efficient measures to be adopted, to give relief to those who, in every part of the country, were groaning under the yoke of patronage ; and with the view of granting both effectual and permanent relief to all who might require it, did they form themselves into a presbytery. They did not consider that they had so clear a promise of the Great Head of the church amongst them, until they were constituted in his name. And, finally, there was some danger, if they dismissed, on the present occasion, without coming to any final resolution, that they might become disunited amongst themselves, and might not be favoured with another opportunity, equally convenient with the present, of forming themselves into a presbytery.*

Such were the reasons that influenced them in associating together in a presbyterial capacity. They agreed, however, that for some time to come their meetings should be held chiefly for prayer and religious conference ; and that before proceeding to any judicial acts, they would wait to see whether a spirit of reformation might not yet pervade the ecclesiastical judicatories, and thus a door be opened for their restoration to the bosom of the national church. Before

Fisher, minister at Kinclaven. Mr Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, and Mr Thomas Mair of Orwell, though present on this interesting occasion, did not connect themselves with the presbytery till some time afterward.

* Minutes of the Associate Presbytery.

separating, they appointed Messrs Wilson and Moncrieff a committee to prepare an extended statement of the reasons of their protestation before the Commission. These brethren executed with great care, and with much ability, the task assigned them ; and having presented at a future meeting of presbytery a long and an elaborate statement of the reasons of their secession from the national church, the whole was carefully revised by all the brethren, and was soon after published under the sanction of the Presbytery. It was entitled, “ A Testimony to the doctrine, government, and discipline, of the Church of Scotland ; or, Reasons by Mr Ebenezer Erskine, &c. for their protestation before the Commission of the General Assembly, November 1733.”

It does not consist with the plan which the writer of this narrative has prescribed to himself in the prosecution of this history, to introduce into its pages the various official publications emitted from time to time by the Secession Church. To do so, would be to load the narrative with a mass of matter, which, however excellent it might be in itself, could not be supposed interesting to the greater part of his readers, and would be apt to deter them from the perusal of this work. To this rule, however, which I have laid down for my guidance, occasional exceptions must occur, otherwise the interests of truth would suffer, and an injury would be inflicted on the memories of the good. The notice which I am now about to take of the first Testimony published by the Fathers of the Secession, forms one of these exceptions. Let none of my readers close this book in disgust at the mentioning of the word *Testimony*. I am aware that the term is, in the estimation of many, sufficiently vulgar and commonplace, and that there is a danger of their being seized with nausea at the very sight of it ; but I know also, that a publication having an unpromising title, may yet be distinguished for the excellence of its contents, and that we are to judge of the value of it from the latter of these, and not from the former. Had the Fathers of the Secession, instead of adopting the plain and familiar word *Testimony*, dignified

their official productions with some high sounding title, the probability is, that the men of the present day, enlightened and intelligent though they be, would not have deemed them unworthy of their notice. The province of the historian, however, is not to invent new names for works that have been long in existence ; his business is to give a faithful narrative of the past, as well as of present events, calling every thing by its proper name ; and seeing that the venerable men, with whom the Secession originated, after having formed themselves into a presbytery, considered it due to themselves, and to the cause in which they were engaged, to publish a defence of their conduct and of their principles, and gave to their defence, when published, the title of “ A Testimony to the doctrine, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland,” &c., it certainly becomes the men of the present generation to give to these intrepid worthies a patient and attentive hearing. The language in which their sentiments are clothed, is occasionally homely and uncouth ; but the sentiments themselves are dignified, manly, and scriptural in a high degree ; they breathe a spirit of the most ardent devotedness to the cause of God, and to the best interests of the human race. The writer of this work, then, craves no indulgence from his readers, while he presents them with a brief exposition of the statements contained in the first Testimony published by the Associate Presbytery in vindication of their conduct. In giving this exposition, he is influenced chiefly by the following reasons :—1. The conduct of Mr Erskine, and of those who acted along with him, has been frequently arraigned and condemned, in the strongest terms, by writers who have espoused the opposite side of the question. They have been stigmatized as “ popular demagogues,” and have been charged with “ unreasonable intemperance and pertinacity,”* in opposing the violent measures of the ruling party in the church ; and it is nothing more than an act of common justice to give these men an opportunity of being heard in vindication of them-

* Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine, Appendix, No. I. p. 444, 446.

selves, so that the world may judge on what side truth and justice lie. 2. Many have grown up within the Secession, who are, in a great measure, ignorant of the exact grounds which the founders of the Secession occupied, when they withdrew from the national church, and of the principles which they maintained ; and it is of importance that these should have stated to them, in the language of the first Seceders themselves, what were the views which they held, and what were the reasons that influenced them in forming themselves into a distinct religious society. 3. I conceive that a history of the Secession Church would be very incomplete, did it not furnish those connected with other denominations, with the means of knowing exactly what were the charges preferred by the Seceders against the Established judicatories, and which constituted the original grounds of the Secession ; also, what were the sentiments which they held, in reference to christian doctrine and church polity. That christians of other denominations may be furnished with the means of obtaining this information, I have attempted to give a condensed view of the facts and reasonings contained in the document above mentioned.

In the introduction, the Presbytery give a narrative of the ecclesiastical proceedings carried on against Mr Erskine, and the other brethren, and which terminated in the Commission dissolving the relation betwixt them and their respective congregations. They then take a review of what God had done for the Church of Scotland, during the past periods of her history, and detail the steps by which she had gradually declined in purity. They avow their attachment to the constitution and standards of the church, and declare that they did not secede from the church itself, but from a ruling party within the church, who had got the management of affairs into their hands, and who were pursuing a course of defection, disregarding the laws of Christ, and trampling upon the privileges of the people. Against this party, they state five distinct charges, as the reasons of their Secession from them ; and each of the charges they substantiate, by adducing a va-

riety of facts, which were both too recent and too notorious to be denied.

The first charge which they advance is, that the prevailing party were pursuing measures subversive of the presbyterian constitution of the church. In support of this charge, they refer to repeated instances in which the Assembly had violated their own constitution, and enacted laws, either without previously sending them down, agreeably to the barrier act, to presbyteries, to be considered by them, or in opposition to the declared wishes of the presbyteries. The act of 1730, for instance, which prohibited the recording of reasons of dissent against the decisions of church courts, and which was a grievous infringement of the rights of both ministers and elders, was passed by the Assembly, without being transmitted to the presbyteries at all; and the obnoxious act of 1732, concerning the *settlement of vacant congregations*, was passed by the mere authority of the Assembly, even though the majority of the presbyteries had declared against it. In reference to these and similar proceedings, they complain that “the prevailing party have usurped a legislative power and authority over the house of God, in making laws and constitutions, that not only have no manner of warrant from the Word, but are contrary unto it; and they exercise a lordly and magisterial power over the flock and heritage of God, in binding their decrees upon the consciences of the members of the church, by threatening and actually inflicting the highest censures of the church upon them, if they do not submit to their arbitrary impositions; and this we judge to be a thrust at our constitution, and that in a most sensible manner.” They farther refer, in support of the same charge, to the unconstitutional power assumed by the Commission, in determining the causes referred to them. This delegated court engrossed almost the whole authority of the church, and matters of the highest importance were settled by them in a manner the most arbitrary and absolute. By pleading that their decisions, however unjust they might be, were irreversible, they made their own will and pleasure the

rule of their conduct. The wishes of the people, and the remonstrances of presbyteries, were alike disregarded by them. Contrary to the common maxim, *delegatus non potest delegari*, they assumed to themselves the power of erecting sub-commissions, and invested them with powers which were not entrusted to themselves, and which it was not in the power, even of the Assembly, to give, viz. to invade the rights of presbyteries, which are radical judicatories. These sub-committees, appointed by the Commission, travelled over the country, received the trials of young men, and ordained them, in opposition to the declared mind both of the presbyteries in which, and of the parishes over which, they were settled; and this they did, without waiting the judgment of the ensuing Assembly, though protestations for leave to complain to the Assembly had been entered in due time and form. *

* Instead of appointing the presbyteries themselves, as the constitution required, to execute the sentences of the supreme court, the Assembly or Commission, appointed individual ministers of their own number; or members of synods, or presbyteries in the vicinity of the parishes, to execute their sentences, by giving collation to the presentees, in the same forms which, in ordinary cases, would have been competent to the presbyteries themselves, leaving it to such members of the presbyteries as were willing to join with them, to take part in the transaction.

"This expedient was adopted in 1729, in the settlement of New Machar; and continued to be resorted to, in cases of similar difficulty, for twenty years after that time. It was certainly a great deviation from constitutional law. But the times were difficult. The scruples of many of the most popular clergy were as sincere as they were obstinate. The agitation of the people on the subject was every day becoming more visible and violent. The opposition to many of the presentees, who were inducted by the committees appointed by the supreme court, was as inveterate after their induction as before, and their churches were in danger of being almost entirely deserted. The leaders in the Assemblies were not willing to add to the struggle occasioned by the opposition of the people, a controversy with the scruples of the clergy; and this was the origin of what was then denominated among the populace, 'The Riding Committees.'"—Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine, Appendix, p. 442.

The attempt which the reverend baronet here makes to apologise for what he calls "a great deviation from constitutional law," is certainly a very sorry one. What a miserable contrast do his statements present to the firm and dignified language which the Seceders employ, when reprobating this same "deviation."

“ The above conduct of the Commission,” say they, “ appears to us to strike at the very root of our presbyterian constitution, and to be a piece of tyranny equal to any thing exercised by the diocesan prelates, when they were in power and authority in the land. It is a presbyterian principle, founded upon the word of God, that the authoritative missions of men unto the work and office of the holy ministry, by the trial of their gifts and qualifications, and the setting of them apart to that sacred office, by prayer and imposition of hands, belongs unto a constitute presbytery. It is also a received principle amongst us, that the power of superior courts over a presbytery, is not a *privative*, but a *cumulative* power and authority ; that is, neither synods, nor assemblies, nor their commissions, can deprive presbyteries of these inherent rights and privileges that belong unto them, or of that power and authority that they have received from the Lord Jesus, the only head and king of the church, but that they ought to protect and support them in the exercise of the same. But the present management of the commissions of our several General Assemblies, in appointing committees with a power of trial and ordination, is a taking of that power out of the hands of presbyteries, which properly belongs unto them ; and, at the same time, an erecting of a court, with a power of mission, unto the work and office of the ministry, that has no manner of foundation in the word of God.”

The *second* charge which the Seceding brethren advance against the ruling party in the church is, “ that they are pursuing such measures as do actually corrupt, or have the most direct tendency to corrupt, the doctrine contained in our excellent Confession of Faith.” In support of this charge, they refer to the lenity that had been shown by the Assembly to Professor Simson, after he had been convicted, on the clearest evidence, of teaching the most dangerous errors ; also, to the manner in which certain publications of Professor Campbell of St Andrews had been received, containing in them sentiments that were opposed both to the word of God, and the standards of the church. “ Instead of com-

menacing any process," say they, "against the author, he is caressed and countenanced in our assemblies, as being a fit man for the purpose of our ruling side, who are carrying on the present course of defection!" They appeal, farther, to the refusal of the ecclesiastical rulers to listen to the representations of synods and presbyteries, urging them to publish an act confirmatory of the truths that had been attacked, and warning the people against the dangerous errors that had been propagated. After showing that a new and fashionable mode of preaching had found its way into the church, which consisted in a "sapless and lifeless descanting upon the moral virtues," and in which the peculiar doctrines of the gospel were seldom if ever alluded to, they proceed thus:—"Seeing the Church of Scotland is in such circumstances at present, through the influence and management of the prevailing party, there is too much ground to fear, that in a little time (if God do not prevent) this Established Church shall only be orthodox, in the same sense that the Church of England is so, by subscribing the articles which are truly calvinist in the doctrinal parts, while yet arminian doctrine is every where taught by her clergy.* Upon which account, we judge this generation, and our poor posterity, in the utmost danger of losing the gospel in its power and purity, through the prevalency of a corrupt and unsound ministry."

The *third* charge which they prefer against the prevailing party is, "That sinful and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion are imposed, by restraining ministerial freedom and faithfulness in testifying against the present course of defection and backsliding." In support of this charge, they appeal to the decision in the case of Mr Erskine, who was found censurable for presuming, in his public ministrations, to find fault with certain ecclesiastical proceedings, which he considered unconstitutional and unwarrantable.

* At the period here referred to, arminianism was almost universally prevalent throughout the Church of England; but it must gratify every friend of religion to know, that the number of evangelical and faithful ministers in that church has, of late years, been greatly on the increase.

Such a decision they consider as equivalent to a declaration, on the part of the Assembly, that henceforth no minister, unless he resolves to become obnoxious to censure, shall testify from the pulpit against any act of Assembly, or against any proceedings of the church courts, however sinful they may be. They regard this restraining of ministerial freedom as unreasonable in its own nature, and inconsistent with the faithful discharge of the duties of the ministry ; for they say, “ there is nothing more plain, than that every minister is bound to declare the whole counsel of God. As he is to teach the observance of all things contained in the word, so he is to show Israel his transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin ; and if the sin be committed by the officers of the church, it is so much the more dangerous to the whole body, and therefore ought to be testified against, because that, when the *leaders of the people do cause them to err, they that are led of them are destroyed,*”

The *fourth* charge is, “ That these corrupt courses are carried on with a high hand, notwithstanding that the ordinary means have been used to reclaim them, and to stop the current of the present defection.” Under this head, they complain that the Assembly has obstinately refused to listen to the petitions, representations, complaints, and remonstrances sent to them from presbyteries and synods. These were oft-times not permitted to be read in the Assembly, but were generally handed over to a committee, where they were for the most part consigned to oblivion. When the commissioners from presbyteries urged upon the supreme court the necessity of attending to the complaints of their constituents, the answer returned was, *the Assembly's time is over, or, the Assembly has no time to enter upon the consideration of these things.* “ The last Assembly,” say the Seceding brethren, “ found time to intrude ministers into the parishes of Stow and Kingoldrum, and to pass severe and unjust sentences against some ministers in the presbytery of Dunfermline and the four protesting brethren, but *had no time* to consider the weighty grievances that the flock of Christ

are groaning under ; we must say it with regret, they *found time to oppress them* more and more, but *not to help or relieve them.*"

The *fifth* article of their charge is, " that they are excluded from keeping up a proper testimony against the defections and backslidings of the prevailing party, in a way of ministerial communion with them." " If we express our sentiments in the forms of petitions and representations, these were disregarded. If we lift up our voice in the pulpit against proceedings which we consider to be sinful, we are summoned to the bar of the church courts and rebuked. If we protest against such censure, as interfering with the free and faithful exercise of our ministry, we are suspended from the sacred office ; and if we cannot yield obedience to a sentence of suspension pronounced in such an arbitrary manner, we are cast out of the communion of the church, and declared to be no longer ministers of the Established Church." From this deduction of particulars they draw the following conclusion : —" From all which it is plain, that the prevailing party will not allow us to maintain a proper testimony, in a way of ministerial communion with them, against their present steps of defection and backsliding ; and therefore it is not only warrantable for us, but we are laid under a necessity, to lift up a testimony, in a way of *secession* from them, against the present current of defection, whereby our constitution is subverted, our doctrine is corrupted, and the heritage and flock of Christ are wounded, scattered, and broken, that *we may not partake with them in their sins*, and may do what in us lies to transmit unto succeeding generations these valuable truths that have been handed down to us by the contendings and wrestlings of a great cloud of witnesses in Scotland since the dawning of reformation-light amongst us."

Such were the charges which the Seceding brethren preferred against the ruling party in the church ; and on these grounds did they withdraw from all connexion with men who were pursuing measures so unscriptural, unconstitutional, and oppressive. Never were charges contained in

any enditement substantiated by evidence so full, so clear, and convincing. Never were reasons more valid stated by any individuals for withdrawing from the communion of a church, and forming themselves into a distinct religious society. Every unprejudiced person who peruses the brief statement that is here given of them, must be convinced that the Seceders acted the part of honest, conscientious men, and that there was no other course, consistent with a good conscience, left them to pursue, than that which they actually adopted.

Afraid lest their enemies might attempt to bring odium upon them by holding them up to the world as men of unsound principles, they subjoined to their reasons of secession a statement of their belief. And that posterity may know what were the principles held by these excellent men, the following outline is given of the declaration which they published :—

1. They own the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners.

2. They declare their sincere and hearty adherence to the form of worship received and practised in the Church of Scotland.

3. They believe with their hearts, and confess with their mouths, that the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is the alone head and king of his church, so he hath appointed a particular form of government, therein to continue to the end of the world unalterable ; and they receive and embrace presbyterian church government, by kirk-sessions, presbyteries, synods, and assemblies, as that form of government which they judge to be agreeable to, and founded upon, the Word of God.

4. They believe that the visible church, which is also catholic and universal under the gospel, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children, and is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and house and family of God, unto which Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gather-

ing and perfecting the saints in this life to the end of the world.

5. They acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the National Covenant, frequently sworn by all ranks of persons in Scotland; also of the Solemn League and Covenant sworn by all ranks both in England and Scotland in the year 1643.

6. They believe, that Christ hath appointed church officers under him, distinct from the civil magistrate; and that to these are committed the keys of doctrine, discipline, and government.

7. They believe that the decrees and determinations of all councils, made up of fallible men, are no farther to be received or submitted to by the church, than in so far as they are consonant unto the word of God.

8. They believe; that, when the plurality of officers in any particular church under the New Testament, do make defection, from the purity of doctrine, worship, or government, it is lawful for the lesser part of church-officers, who are holding the head, and keeping the foundation of government, to manage the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in an agreeableness to the laws of Christ.

9. They believe, that it appertains unto every several congregation to elect their own ministers and officers; and that altogether it is to be avoided, that any man be violently intruded or thrust upon any congregation; and that this liberty should with all care be reserved to every several congregation, to have the ministers settled among them with their own call and consent.

10. They believe, that it is the duty of faithful ministers, when defections prevail in a church, and when iniquity is established by law, to give faithful warning against the prevailing evils of the time; and when censured for it, though at the bar of an Assembly, it is their duty to protest for the cause of truth, that it may not fall in the streets; and, when suspended or otherwise censured, that it is their duty to continue in the exercise of their ministry, necessity

being laid upon them by their dedication to that office, and the command of God to preach the gospel, and so to obey God rather than man; especially when it is considered that submission to arbitrary authority, in a case wherein the public cause is concerned, is a plain giving up with their testimony.

Though the Commission had passed a sentence, dissolving the relation betwixt the four brethren and their respective congregations, and declaring them to be no longer ministers of the Established Church, yet such was the agitated state of popular feeling, that the sentence could not be carried into effect. The treatment, which the brethren had received, was considered by not a few to be harsh and oppressive in a high degree. They enjoyed the sympathy and the prayers of a large portion of the people; and many of the ministers regarded their struggles with feelings of the deepest interest. In an especial manner, their congregations clung around them with affectionate fondness, and declared their resolution to abide by them "through good report and through bad report." Mr William Ferguson of Killin, who had been appointed to intimate the sentence against Mr Wilson, from the pulpit of the Old Church of Perth, complained in a letter to the Commission, that he had been met at a distance from the town by a tumultuous multitude, who forcibly prevented his entrance.* Professor Campbell of St Andrews, having applied to the Sheriff-substitute of Perth to support him, in intimating the sentence against Mr Moncrieff from the pulpit of the church of Abernethy, and the Sheriff having refused to do so,† protested against his conduct. This protest

* Struthers' History of Scotland, Vol. II. p. 3.

† In the act of toleration passed in the reign of Queen Anne, there is a clause inserted, which prohibits all magistrates from carrying into effect the sentences of ecclesiastical courts: And the Sheriff of Perth, when he refused to interfere in the case of Mr Moncrieff, acted in strict accordance with the letter of the law, as well as with the spirit of it. The following is the clause referred to:—"And be it farther declared and enacted by the authority aforesaid, that no civil pain or forfeiture, or disability whatsoever, shall be in any ways incurred by any person or persons, by reason of any excommuni-

was transmitted, through the Commission, to the next General Assembly; and by them was referred to the committee of overtures, where, amongst other papers of greater importance, it was consigned to oblivion. At the sacramental occasion at Abernethy, in April 1734, there was assembled, from all parts of the country, such a concourse of people as had never before been witnessed on any similar occasion. The Seceding brethren were looked upon as martyrs in the cause of truth, they were regarded as the unflinching advocates of popular rights; and on these, as well as other accounts, their ministrations were sought after with the greatest eagerness. Mr Currie of Kinglassie, who afterwards became one of the bitterest enemies of the Secession, and made some violent attacks upon it from the press, at first approved so highly of the conduct of these faithful ministers, that when preaching in the Tolbooth Church of Edinburgh on a fast day before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, he expressed himself concerning them in the following terms: "Though they should suffer suspension, deposition, imprisonment, banishment, heading or hanging, I am convinced in my conscience they suffer for a good cause, and the Lord will own and honour them for it."*

On the second day of May, 1734, the General Assembly met, and the attention of the country was fixed upon its proceedings. Considerable exertions had been made to send up to this meeting men of a right spirit, and hopes were entertained that a conciliatory course would be adopted toward the ejected brethren. When the Assembly met, it was found that their friends mustered strong; and even the leaders of the opposite party seem to have been ashamed of the violence of their own proceedings. The great ferment that prevailed among the people, and a fear lest the spirit of dis-

casion or prosecution in order to excommunication by the church judicatories in that part of Great Britain, called Scotland; and all civil magistrates are hereby expressly prohibited and discharged to force or compel any person or persons to appear when summoned, or to give obedience to any such sentence when pronounced, any law or custom to the contrary notwithstanding."

* Wilson's Defence, p. 110.

affection should spread wider and wider, made them act with greater caution. The proceedings of the Assembly were of a more popular kind, and discovered more of a spirit of reformation than any that had characterised the meetings of Assembly for some time past. The act of 1730, discharging the entering, upon the record, of dissents against the decisions of church courts, and the act of 1732, concerning the planting of vacant parishes, were repealed. A complaint of the parish of Auchtermuchty, and of the presbytery of Cupar, against a violent settlement, which the Commission had appointed to take place in that parish, was sustained. It was found, in this instance, that the Commission had exceeded their powers, and the settlement was annulled. When the Commission book, also, was examined, and the proceedings approved of, it was done "with a reservation as to their conduct and sentence passed against Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher, excepting also from the approbation of their book, the settlement of the parish of Troquire, and the judgment given by them relative to the planting of the parish of Portmoak, which are reserved till the complaints concerning these be heard, reserving also the consideration of the remarks made on their method of proceeding to, or executing other settlements." This Assembly appointed their Commission to petition his majesty and parliament for the repeal of the patronage act.* With the view also of satisfying the minds of those, who considered that ministerial freedom was restrained by the late proceedings of the judicatories toward Mr Erskine and his brethren, an act was sanctioned by the

* The Commission, during the course of this summer, sent a deputation to London, consisting of the Rev. Messrs Gordon of Alford, Willison of Dundee, and M'Intosh of Errol, with the view of obtaining the removal of this grievance. It is needless to add that their exertions were unsuccessful. The Assembly, that met the following year, sent another embassy to the metropolis, on the same errand. The deputation consisted of the Rev. Messrs Anderson of St Andrews, and Gordon of Alford, together with Colonel John Erskine of Carnock. After making every effort to obtain their object, they were not more successful than their predecessors.

Assembly, in which it is declared, “ for the satisfaction of all,”—“ That due and regular ministerial freedom is still left to all ministers ; and that the same was not, nor shall be held nor understood to be anywise impaired or restrained by the late Assembly’s decision in that particular process.”

But by far the most important act of this Assembly was the following, which they passed concerning their Seceding brethren :—“ The General Assembly, considering the great hurt and prejudice that hath at all times arisen, and must yet arise, to the church, from divisions and animosities creeping in and taking root among the members thereof, notwithstanding their unanimity in sentiments upon material and fundamental points, which more nearly concern the promoting the interests of our blessed Lord and Saviour, the establishing the peace of the church, and the advancement of practical godliness and true religion within the bounds of it, and particularly the lamentable consequences that have followed, and may yet follow, upon the separation of Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher, from this church and judicatures thereof, and judging it their duty to endeavour, by all just and proper means consistent with the honour and glory of God, and the maintaining the peace and authority of the church, to restore harmony and brotherly love among all the members of it : Therefore, the General Assembly, without further inquiring into the occasions or steps of proceeding, either on the part of the said brethren, or by the several judicatories under whose consideration their case hath been, which may have produced that unhappy separation, but resolving that all questions on these heads shall for hereafter be comfortably removed, have empowered, and hereby do empower, the synod of Perth and Stirling, before whom the exceptions to some part of the conduct of two of these four reverend brethren were first taken and tried, upon such application made to them, as they shall judge proper, to take the case of the said four brethren, as it now stands, under their consideration, with full power to the said synod to proceed and

do therein, as they shall find most justifiable and expedient for restoring the peace and preserving the authority of this church, and restoring them to their respective charges. But with this express direction, that the synod shall not take upon them to judge of the legality or formality of the former proceedings of the church judicatories, in relation to this affair, or either to approve of, or censure the same ; but shall only, in virtue of the power and authority now delegated to them by the Assembly, proceed to take such steps for attaining the above ends for the future, as they shall find just, and tending to edification. And the Assembly do hereby appoint the foresaid synod to meet at Stirling upon the first Tuesday of July next, and from time to time to name and appoint the place and diets of their after meetings, on the said affair, as they shall see cause, until the matter shall be ripened for a final conclusion ; and recommend to them to use their utmost endeavours to bring the matter, as soon as reasonably can be, to a final and happy issue." *

It is not difficult to perceive what were the motives which dictated such an act as this. Many of the members of the present Assembly, both ministers and elders, were convinced that the Commission, in loosing the protesting brethren from their congregations, and declaring them no longer ministers of the Established Church, had acted precipitately and unjustly ; and they were truly desirous to see them restored again to their charges. These of course gladly acquiesced in any measure that afforded the prospect of such a desirable event. Another portion of the Assembly were not so favourably disposed toward the ejected ministers ; but they were afraid of what would be the consequences, should they persist in carrying into effect the sentence which had already been pronounced against them. They perceived that the current of popular opinion ran strongly in their favour. The number of petitions, sent up from presbyteries and synods, showed that the church was agitated from the one end to the other ; and unless some healing measures should

* Acts of Assembly, 1734.

be adopted, the probability was, that the breach already occasioned would become wider and wider. Hence proceeded the act above quoted, in which the Assembly declare that all former proceedings and decisions shall stand as they are, while at the same time they authorize the synod of Perth and Stirling to take measures for restoring the Seceding ministers to their charges ! If the Assembly, or Commission, of the preceding year had done wrong in ejecting these ministers from the church, why not *declare* so, and disannul their proceedings ? This was nothing more than an act of justice to these men, who had been so harshly treated, and whom they were now anxious to restore. If the Assembly, or Commission, had done right in ejecting them, then certainly the grounds of their ejection remained as valid as ever ; and if so, how shall the present Assembly be vindicated, in agreeing to receive back into their fellowship men who had previously been pronounced unworthy of their communion, without either requiring or obtaining from them any evidence of their penitence ? Whoever were the framers of this act, the whole tenor of it shows that it was dictated, not by a sense of justice, but by fear. On the one hand, pride forbade the acknowledgment of any thing like error or rashness in the past proceedings. So sensitive were the Assembly on this point, that they prohibited the synod, when the matter should come before them, from uttering a single whisper with regard to the past. On the other hand, the dread of giving farther offence to those who had shown themselves friendly to the Seceders, and of driving them also from the communion of the church, made them agree to an act of amnesty in favour of those who had been ejected. Should they not thus succeed in bringing back those who had already renounced their authority, they thought that, by this appearance of clemency, they would at least secure those who might be wavering in their allegiance.

The synod of Perth and Stirling met on the second day of July, agreeably to the appointment of the Assembly ; and having taken the case of the four brethren under their con-

sideration, they unanimously agreed, after a long and serious deliberation, to the following decision :—“ This Synod, by virtue of the foresaid delegated power and authority, and in name of our Lord Jesus Christ, did, and hereby do, with one voice and consent, take off the sentences pronounced by the Commission of the General Assembly, 1733, against the foresaid four brethren, Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher, declaring the same of no force or effect for the future, unite and restore them to ministerial communion with this church, to their several charges, and to the exercise of all parts of the ministerial function therein, as fully and freely as there never had been act, sentence, obstacle, or impediment whatsoever in the way thereof in time past, all which are hereby declared *sopite*, and set aside for the future. And the synod do recommend to these four reverend brethren, to carry towards the Lord’s servants, their brethren, ministers of this church, and their respective flocks and charges, as ministers of Christ and his gospel ought to do, in all time coming. And they do, in the like manner, recommend it to the respective presbyteries of Perth, Stirling, and Dunkeld, to receive them as members of their respective presbyteries, and behave to them as ministers of Christ in this church ; and do enjoin not only the ministers of the said presbyteries, but also of all other presbyteries within their bounds, and the said four brethren, so to demean themselves towards each other, as may answer the obligations they came under by their ordination vows in the Lord. And the synod take this opportunity to warn all the people in this province, to beware of every thing that may have a tendency to obstruct the good ends of this act, and what the General Assembly had so much at heart, viz. the peace and union of this church, by doing what may encourage division, or weaken the hands of the Lord’s servants set over them. And further, the synod appoint the names of the said four brethren to be immediately enrolled in the records of this synod, and that Mr Hamilton read this act from the pulpit of Stirling, Mr Black from

the pulpit of Perth, Mr Meek from the pulpit of Abernethy, and Mr Gow from the pulpit of Kinclaven, on some Lord's day betwixt and the first of August. And the synod recommend it to Mr Hamilton to acquaint Mr Erskine, Mr M'Intosh to acquaint Mr Wilson, Mr Palmer to acquaint Mr Moncrieff, and Mr Gow to acquaint Mr Fisher, of this act and sentence with their first conveniency. And finally, they appoint this act to be insert in all the presbytery books within this province, and they leave it to every minister to intimate the same to their congregations, as they see cause."

It was expected by the friends of the Seceders, that now, when the sentence of the Commission was removed, the brethren would immediately return to the bosom of the church, and that all past differences would be buried in oblivion. So confidently was this expectation entertained by them, that the presbytery of Stirling, soon after the meeting of synod, elected Mr Erskine moderator, and appointed a deputation of their number to wait upon him, and request him to take the chair. The intended honour Mr Erskine modestly, but firmly, declined. The presbytery, however, kept the chair vacant for some time, in the expectation that he would comply. With the view of putting an end to this state of suspense, Mr Erskine wrote them a letter, in which he gave a candid statement of his reasons for not returning to the communion of the national church. The following extract will show what were the sentiments he entertained concerning the late proceedings of the supreme court. While he was not insensible to the exertions which had been made by the friends of truth, to promote the cause of reformation, yet he was convinced that the majority were actuated by the same spirit as formerly. "I know," says he, "it is strenuously pleaded, that what is done by the last Assembly, lays a sufficient ground for our accession, notwithstanding of all that is past. I cannot help differing with those that are of this opinion. I humbly conceive there is a great difference between a positive reformation, and a stop or sist

given to a deformation. I am far from derogating from the stand made by the worthy members of the last Assembly against the career of the corrupt party. But allow me to say, that any thing done appears rather a check or restraint upon those men for a time, than any real cleanly reformation. The party are as numerous in judicatories, and actuated by the same spirit of defection as ever; and, for the most part, carry the affairs of Christ's kingdom, in inferior courts, in the same channel, since the Assembly 1734, as before.

"Some brethren call us to come in and help them against the current of defection; but now that the hand of Providence has taken us out of the current against which we were swimming, and set us upon the reformation ground, by a solemn testimony and constitution, it would be vain for us to endanger ourselves by running into the current again, unless our reverend brethren, who call for our help, can persuade us that our so doing will turn the current, and save both them and ourselves, and so preserve the Lord's work and testimony. In my opinion, it would be by far much wiser for these reverend brethren to come out of the dangerous current to us, than for us to come back to them, Jer. xv. 19-21. No doubt worldly motives give a strong bias against this notion; but if it is our duty, we are bound to forsake all, and follow the Lord."*

The only one of the Seceding brethren on whose mind the proceedings of the Assembly appear to have produced a favourable impression, was Mr Wilson of Perth. He was for some time considerably perplexed as to what was the path of duty—whether he ought to return, or continue still in a state of secession. Immediately after the Assembly, he wrote a letter to Mr Erskine, expressing a hope of a reunion with the church,† and this hope he did not altogether renounce, until the proceedings of two or three subsequent Assemblies.

* This letter is inserted at full length in the Christian Repository, vol. iv. p. 461.

† Ferrier's Memoirs of Mr Wilson, p. 278.

showed how vain it was to cherish it. "I own," says he, "that, after the meeting of Assembly 1734, I was in much perplexity about our continuing in a state of secession. It occasioned many thoughts of heart unto me, to understand what was duty in the present case. But as I had no hesitation about my duty, when I did, together with my other three brethren, declare a secession from the judicatories of this church, in our protestation before the Commission, November, 1733; so when I have observed the conduct of the said judicatories, since the year 1734, I have been gradually cleared, and more and more confirmed, that it is our duty to continue in a state of secession."* These are not the sentiments of a restless agitator, or of a factious demagogue, anxious to foment troubles, or to perpetuate strife; they are the sentiments of a person acting under the influence of an enlightened judgment, and of a tender conscience, and who is truly desirous to know what is the path of duty, that he may pursue it. *Such* were the men with whom the Secession originated. Mr Wilson, afterward referring to this critical period of his ministerial course, and to the perplexity of mind which he experienced, says, "I desire to bless the Lord, who cleared my way, and led me, by his good hand upon me, to join my brethren, though the unworthiest among them, in the testimony that is now lifted up for the truths of our Lord Jesus, in opposition to the manifold injuries that are done; both to his truths and members, by the present judicatories of this established church."†

The Presbytery, after having weighed impartially all the circumstances of the case, were unanimously of opinion that, notwithstanding what both the Assembly and the synod had done to clear the way for their return, the grounds of their secession, with one or two exceptions, remained as valid as ever. They, therefore, resolved still to continue in a state of separation, until they should see symptoms of a more extensive reformation taking place within the national church.

† Wilson's Defence (Continuation), p. 30.

† Ibid.

Having prepared a statement of the reasons which influenced them in coming to this determination, they published them in a pamphlet, immediately before the meeting of Assembly 1735.* In this statement, they pay a just tribute to the exertions of the many excellent men who were members of the preceding Assembly; and they admit that if more was not accomplished by this Assembly, it was not owing to any lukewarmness on the part of these faithful ministers, but to the preponderating influence of a still stronger party, who were animated by a different spirit. They give the Assembly of 1734, credit for not giving any direct countenance to violent settlements, and also for imposing a check upon the arbitrary proceedings of the Commission. They farther admit that, by the rescinding of the acts 1730 and 1732, above referred to, one original ground of complaint was removed. But, except in these particular points, the grounds of their secession, which they had stated at full length in their Testimony, remained exactly as they were. No warning had been emitted against the gross doctrinal errors that prevailed, and no adequate censure inflicted on those who were guilty of teaching these errors. Congregations who had had ministers violently intruded on them, were required to submit to their ministrations, on pain of being deprived of sealing ordinances altogether, as no other minister was permitted to administer them, without being subjected to the highest censure of the church. The act, also, respecting Mr Erskine, censuring him for the freedom which he had used in his sermon, still stood unrepealed. Against this act the brethren had protested, as imposing a restraint upon ministerial freedom; and, as the synod had been prohibited from judging either of the legality or formality of this act, or of any of the proceedings that had taken place, it is obvious that the case stood exactly as it was when the ministers first protested. If ministerial freedom was restrained by the act, when it was first passed, it was restrained by it still.

* This pamphlet was entitled, "Reasons by Mr Ebenezer Erskine, &c. why they have not acceded to the judicatories of the established church."

It is true the Assembly had declared that due and regular ministerial freedom “ *was not*, nor shall be held or understood to be anywise impaired or restrained by the decision against Mr Erskine, and his brethren.” The Presbytery show that this declaration of the Assembly, concerning ministerial freedom, is altogether unsatisfactory ; that it is little else than a play upon words. The remarks which they make upon it, display great acuteness and ingenuity. The substance of them is as follows :—What the Assembly mean by *due and regular ministerial freedom*, they have not told us ; but two facts are sufficiently obvious. First, that Mr Erskine was rebuked at the bar of the Assembly, for having testified in public against certain acts and proceedings of the church courts which he considered to be sinful ; and, secondly, that the four brethren were first suspended from their office, and afterwards declared to be no longer ministers of the national church, merely because they offered to protest against a sentence which they conceived to be unjust. When these two facts are viewed in connexion with the above declaration, the inference is fair, either that the Assembly do not consider it to be *due and regular* ministerial freedom for a minister to testify publicly against any ecclesiastical proceedings, however sinful and unwarrantable they may be, or for those who have been aggrieved by an unjust sentence, to enter their protest against it. Or, if the Assembly do consider that such conduct is consistent with *due and regular* ministerial freedom, then it is obvious that such freedom *was restrained* by the treatment which the brethren received ; inasmuch as this was exactly the freedom for which Mr Erskine and his friends were visited with the heaviest censures of the church, both as a punishment to themselves, and as a warning to all others who should be guilty of similar conduct.

It was certainly making too large a demand upon the credulity of the Seceders, first to censure, next suspend, and, finally, eject them from their charges, for exercising privileges which had been claimed and exercised by ministers of

the Church of Scotland ever since it had existed as a church, and then, after having done all this, gravely to tell these very men, that ministerial freedom “*was not impaired or restrained*” by such usage. Such a declaration could not impose upon the most simple, much less upon those acute and ingenuous-minded men for whom it was chiefly intended. The Presbytery give a just interpretation of this act, when they declare its meaning to be shortly this:—“That ministers of this church are allowed ministerial freedom, providing they do not from the pulpit testify against the unwarrantableness of any act of Assembly, or proceedings of church judicatories, and providing they do not protest against an Assembly, even though they should proceed to inflict censures on their brethren for such a testimony.”

The Presbytery, having stated fully and candidly the reasons why they could not in present circumstances accede to the judicatories of the national church, notwithstanding that the sentence of the Commission had been removed, conclude by making the following proposals, which, if carried into effect by the Assembly, would remove their difficulties, and pave the way for their return.

1. “That a seasonable warning be emitted against the infidelity and gross prevailing errors of the day.

2. “That the sentence of Assembly, censuring Mr Erskine for the freedom which he used in his synod sermon, also that which appointed the highest censures of the church to be inflicted on the four brethren for protesting against said decision, be rescinded, and all that followed thereupon be declared null and void: Farther, that all the ministers of the church be enjoined to give faithful warning against the prevailing corruptions of the times.

3. “That the decision of the same Assembly, 1733, concerning some brethren in the presbytery of Dunfermline, be also rescinded; and that it be declared lawful for any minister of the church, to dispense sealing ordinances to those who have had ministers intruded on them, contrary to the word of God, and the rules of the church founded thereupon.

4. " That should the patronage act not be repealed, the acceptance of presentations be declared contrary to the principles of this church ; that all preachers accepting of them be deprived of their license ; and that all ministers guilty of a similar transgression be suspended, or, should they pertinaciously adhere, be deposed : Farther, that it be enacted, ' That in all time coming no minister shall be settled in any congregation without the call and consent of the majority of that congregation who are in full communion.

5. " That presbyteries, in licensing and ordaining men to the office of the ministry, be strictly enjoined to inquire not only into their literature, but also into their acquaintance with the power of godliness, and the work of the Spirit upon their souls ; and that they admit none to trials in order to preaching, except such as are known to be of sound principles, of a good report, of a sober, grave, prudent, and pious behaviour, and who have the other qualifications required in Scripture.

6. " That there be an acknowledgment of the great guilt of this land, in pursuing a course of backsliding contrary to the word of God, and the obligations under which its inhabitants lie to promote reformation."

If such things as these were done, " we might," say the Presbytery, " have the comfortable prospect of a pleasant and desirable unity and harmony with our brethren, in concurring with them, according to our weak measure, in all other necessary steps towards a further reformation."*

The resolution of the Seceders not to return to the national church, occasioned no small disappointment and regret to many of their friends in the ministry. They were considered by them as obstinate and pertinacious, and instead of supporting them as formerly, they gradually cooled in their attachment to them. In some instances, their attachment was converted into a spirit of the keenest opposition. There are two classes of persons by whom the part which the brethren acted on the present occasion will be condemned.

* Reasons for not acceding, &c.

There is one class whose vision is of such a kind, that it can discern little or no excellence out of the pale of an Establishment ; no matter what may be the abuses that have crept in during the lapse of generations, still it is *the Establishment*, and this is to them a sufficient reason for tolerating existing corruptions and errors, even where they are as glaring as the light of the sun. For any to forsake the communion of their favourite Establishment, *merely* because corruptions and errors prevail within her, is what they by no means approve of ; and such a sectarian spirit they think it the duty of every good subject to discountenance. To persons of this description, the conduct of the Fathers of the Secession will appear to be highly criminal, who preferred maintaining a separate communion to returning within the pale of the Establishment, after they had the honour of being formally invited back.

There is another class of persons, whose consciences are so accommodating as to permit them to adhere *wherever* the loaves and fishes are to be found in greatest abundance. They have a particular regard for national churches, though they are not very squeamish as to the kind of Establishment to which they adhere, seeing that their devotion is kept alive, not so much by the thought of a pure creed, or an orthodox confession, as of a well filled granary. This class must, of course, regard the conduct of the Seceders as a species of madness, in refusing to return to the verdant pastures of the church, after that the door was thrown open to them, and in preferring to trust to the kind providence of God, rather than to acts of parliament, for their future support. Such persons will never be able to forgive them for voluntarily renouncing well secured stipends, with all their chances of future “ augmentations,” and casting themselves entirely upon the affections of their people for their own maintenance, and that of their families.

With the exception of these two classes, there are few, who, when they take a calm and dispassionate view of all the circumstances of the case, will not be ready to admit, that the four brethren, in refusing to accept the proffered

boon, acted a conscientious and disinterested, as well as a wise, part. They showed themselves to be men of a sound understanding, and of enlightened views, in not again thrusting their necks into the yoke, after that they had once escaped from their former trammels. If they had returned to the establishment without having obtained the redress of the grievances, on account of which they had seceded, their minds must have been incessantly fretted by the oppressive measures of the church courts; and they must either have been frequently entering protests against measures of which they did not approve, or, by silently submitting, they must have had the appearance of acquiescing in them. By returning within the pale of the church, they must have laid their account with being carried along with the current of defection, which they would have found themselves unable successfully to resist: Whereas by remaining without, and forming themselves into a separate communion, altogether independent of political influence, they would thus be able to give full effect to the laws which Christ has laid down for the government of his church; and, at the same time, they would have it in their power to afford relief to multitudes of their countrymen, who had long been groaning under evils inflicted on them by the mal-administration of the ruling party.

The proceedings of the Assembly, which met in 1735, were of a mixed kind. Whether it was that the ecclesiastical rulers had already begun to act with the fear of the Secession before their eyes; or whether they were desirous to conciliate, more than they had yet done, the popular party in the church; so it was, that the spirit of reformation which had begun to make its appearance in the last Assembly, characterised, to a certain extent, the proceedings of this. With the exception of one or two unpopular settlements which this Assembly sanctioned, their proceedings, upon the whole, deserve praise rather than censure. Persons belonging to parishes where ministers had been intruded by violence, were permitted to have the ordinances administered to them by neighbouring ministers, so far as the synod or

presbytery to which they belonged might see it to be for edification. An act for preserving unity, and for preventing error within the church, was agreed to. An excellent overture, recommending and pointing out the necessity of a more evangelical mode of preaching than generally prevailed, was introduced, and sent down to the different presbyteries, to be approved of by them, before it should be finally adopted. The Commission was enjoined to consider some offensive passages in certain publications of Mr Archibald Campbell, Professor of Divinity and Church History at St Andrews, and they were to be prepared to report at next meeting of Assembly. A deputation was appointed to proceed to London, to present petitions to the king and parliament for the repeal of the patronage act. Such proceedings as these, on the part of the Assembly, whatever might be the motives in which they originated, indicated at least a desire to conciliate those whom their past conduct had tended to alienate.

These proceedings, however, effected no change in the sentiments of the Seceders. So far from being satisfied with them, they considered the work of reformation as retrograding, rather than advancing. Accordingly, when the Associate Presbytery met in the month of August, 1735, after long and serious deliberation, and after frequent and earnest prayer to God for the divine direction, the vote was put from the chair, "Proceed to acts of jurisdiction, or not?" when it carried unanimously in the affirmative, to "Proceed." Only Mr Wilson, who cherished much longer than any of his brethren the hope of being re-united to the church, expressed himself on this occasion as not altogether clear about the matter. In consequence of this vote, Messrs Moncrieff, Wilson, and Fisher were appointed to prepare a draught of an assertory act, or to extend the Testimony formerly published, and to embody in it a judicial condemnation of the various steps of defection which had been pursued by the Church of Scotland from the year 1650 downward till that period.

In many parts of the country, the people, not choosing to

countenance the ministrations of intruders, had abandoned the parish churches, and had formed themselves into associations for prayer; waiting to see whether any favourable change should take place in affairs, whereby a prospect might be opened up to them of obtaining deliverance from their grievances. Their eyes were naturally turned toward the Associate Presbytery; and so soon as it was known that the Seceders had resolved to continue in a state of separation from the national church, applications were made to the Presbytery, from various quarters, craving that they would adopt measures, as speedily as possible, for giving relief to those who were groaning under the evils of patronage. At a meeting of the Presbytery, which was held at Kinross in the month of December, commissioners appeared from the parish of Muckhart, and laid on the Presbytery's table a paper subscribed by one hundred heads of families, declaring their secession from the Established Church, and craving that the Presbytery would send them supply of sermon, and would take the necessary steps for licensing young men to preach the gospel. At the same meeting, a similar application was made from the parish of Kinross. The Presbytery, who showed the greatest caution throughout all their proceedings, delayed the consideration of both these petitions till a future meeting. In the month of February, in the following year (1736), this business was again resumed, when the Presbytery granted the prayer of the petitions so far, that they appointed Mr Erskine to preach to the people of Muckhart, and to baptize the children of such of the parents as should be certified by the elders of the parish; also to hold one or more diets of catechising, as he should see proper. Mr Moncrieff was appointed to grant the same privileges to the people of Kinross; but with regard to the licensing of young men, the Presbytery were not yet prepared to give a definite answer. At this meeting, commissioners appeared from several of the parishioners of Portmoak, also from the united societies in and about Edinburgh, craving that the Presbytery would send some of their number to dispense re-

ligious ordinances amongst them. The answer which the Presbytery returned was, that they would take their case into consideration.

Soon after this period, the brethren held a meeting for the purpose of confessing to one another the sinful part which they had acted, in not bearing proper testimony against the decision of the Assembly, 1729, in the case of Professor Simson, whereby he was dismissed from the bar without any adequate censure being inflicted on him. Each of the brethren rose up in his place, and expressed the deep sense which he had of his sinful silence in *that* business ; and it was agreed that the confession of each should be recorded in their minutes. Mr Moncrieff acknowledged that he was guilty of a sinful omission, in that, being a member of said Assembly, he did not protest against their decision, when they continued Mr Simson in the communion of the church, and recognised him both as a minister and as a professor of divinity, after he had been convicted of blaspheming the Son of God by impugning his supreme Deity. Mr Moncrieff having made this acknowledgment, submitted himself to whatever censure the Presbytery might be pleased to inflict. Mr Erskine expressed his sorrow, in that, while he had joined in the protest which was taken by Mr Thomas Boston against the decision, he did not insist on having it marked in the minutes, after that it had been fallen from. Mr Fisher stated, that though he was not a member of the Assembly, yet, being present, he considered that it was a sinful weakness in him not to offer his protest, nor to bear any kind of testimony whatever against a proceeding so derogatory to the honour of the Saviour. These three brethren, having made their acknowledgments, were admonished one by one at the bar of the Presbytery, and they were individually exhorted to greater dependance upon the Lord, and to greater stedfastness in his cause for the future. With regard to Mr Wilson, he craved that it might be marked, that though he was not a member of the Assembly 1729, neither had been present at it, yet he took blame to himself in that,

when the aforesaid decision was reported to the presbytery of Perth, of which he was a member, he did not adopt any method of testifying his disapprobation of it, until he joined along with a number of other ministers in the Representation of 1732. The Presbytery, after considering the circumstances of Mr Wilson's case, did not deem it necessary that any admonition should be tendered to him.

While I respect the motives which influenced the conduct of these good men, on the present occasion, and while I give them full credit for sincerity in the confessions and acknowledgments which they made to one another, yet I am inclined to think that they displayed an excess of zeal, in making their past conduct the subject of judicial inquiry. The proceeding also was at least novel, if not altogether irregular, for persons who, according to their own admission, were involved in the same guilt, with the exception of Mr Wilson, the moderator of the Presbytery, alternately to act the part of reprovers and reprovèd ; to be one while standing at the bar receiving the censure of their brethren, and to be another while engaged in inflicting censure for the very same sin of which they themselves had been guilty. Persons chargeable with the same trespass may confess to one another ; but we do not see what authority they have, the one to rebuke the other.

In the mean time, the General Assembly met on the 13th of May 1736, and as there was still an expectation cherished by many, that the Seceders might yet return to the church, much anxiety was felt as to the course they might pursue. Some of the proceedings of this Assembly were such as to indicate an appearance of reformation, while others of them were of an opposite description. The overture concerning preaching, which had been remitted to presbyteries by last Assembly, was now finally adopted. By this excellent act, it was earnestly recommended to all ministers and preachers to insist frequently, in their sermons, “ upon the truth, necessity, and excellency of supernatural revelation, the supreme Deity of the Son and Holy Ghost, as well as of the Father,

together with the oneness of the Godhead, our sinful and lost estate by nature, the necessity of supernatural grace, and of faith in the righteousness of Christ, without which the best works cannot please God." It was farther recommended to them, "when they handle the doctrines of God's redeeming love, and of his free grace in the justification and salvation of sinners, the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase, and privileges of the new and better covenant, to study to manage these subjects, so as to lead their hearers unto an abhorrence of sin, the love of God and our neighbours, and the practice of universal holiness, seeing it is one great end of the gospel to destroy the works of the devil, and to teach men to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." They were to forbear delivering any thing in public that might tend more to amusement than edification; and they were exhorted to beware of bringing into their sermons and public discourses, matters of doubtful disputation, which tend to gender strife, rather than to promote the edification of Christians.*

Another excellent act, which received the sanction of this Assembly, was one against the intrusion of ministers into vacant congregations. The Assembly declared, that it is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation; and they, therefore, recommended to all judicatories of the church, "to have a due regard to the said principle in planting vacant congregations, and that all presbyteries be at pains to bring about harmony and unanimity in congregations, and to avoid every thing that may excite or encourage unreasonable exceptions in people against a worthy person that may be proposed to be their minister, in the present situation and circumstances of the church, so as none be intruded into such parishes, as they regard the glory of God, and edification of the body of Christ."

Had the Assembly, instead of permitting such acts as these

* Acts of Assembly 1736.

to remain a dead letter in their minute book, taken proper measures to enforce compliance with them upon all who were subject to their authority, it would have had a beneficial effect in checking the progress of discontent, and in restoring peace to the church; but they completely nullified the good effects, which the passing of such acts was fitted to produce, by showing a disregard of them in practice. One or two glaring instances of this occur in the proceedings of this same Assembly. While they declared, that it was, and always had been since the Reformation, a principle of their church, that no minister should be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation, yet with singular inconsistency did these very men, who emitted this declaration, dismiss a complaint of the parishioners of Denny against a sentence of the Commission, ordering the settlement of Mr James Stirling in that parish, though the congregation were almost unanimous in opposing him. They farther showed how sincere they were in making the above declaration, by ordering the presbytery and synod of Dumfries to enrol, as a member of their judicatories, Mr James Pursel who had been intruded into the parish of Troqueer, in the face of a violent opposition; they were enjoined to support him in his ministry, and to endeavour to bring the people to submit to it.

Again, of what use was it to publish acts recommending to all their ministers and preachers to pay strict attention in their discourses to sound doctrine, while they took no pains to enforce compliance with these acts; but, on the contrary, showed a disposition on every occasion to treat with the greatest lenity those who taught sentiments that were opposed to their own standards, and to the word of God. A notable instance of this occurred during the present Assembly. A committee having been appointed by the Commission of last Assembly to examine certain publications* of Professor Campbell of St Andrews, the following objectionable passages were found

† The titles of these publications are, "*Oratio de vanitate luminis naturæ*;" "*The Apostles no Enthusiasts*;" and "*An Inquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*."

to occupy a prominent place in them : First, that men are unable, by their natural powers, to find out the being of a God. Secondly, that the laws of nature are in themselves a sufficient rule to guide rational minds to happiness. Thirdly, that self love is the sole principle and motive of all virtuous and religious actions. Fourthly, that our Lord's disciples, during his lifetime, only expected a temporal deliverance and worldly kingdom ; that between his death and resurrection they concluded him to be a cheat and an impostor ; and that before his resurrection they had no notion of his divinity. By the first of these positions, the Professor was considered as striking at the root of natural religion. By the second, he was considered as teaching that a supernatural revelation of a Saviour, and faith in him, are not necessary to the happiness of fallen man. By the third he was apprehended to make the glory of God only a subordinate end, and a regard to it only a subordinate motive to the desire of our own happiness. And in the fourth, he was considered as using language highly disrespectful to our Lord's disciples, and not consistent with gospel history on that subject.

When the committee presented their report to the Assembly, they gave at the same time Professor Campbell's explanation of his own language. The substance of the Professor's defence was, that his meaning was quite different from what his words expressed ; that though he had certainly made use of the language imputed to him, yet he did not hold the sentiments which were attempted to be drawn from it. The Assembly, notwithstanding the great profession of zeal, which they had made about orthodoxy, did not deem it necessary to give any formal judgment in the matter. They conceived that what the committee had done would be a sufficient warning against the *supposed errors* (these are their own gentle terms) of Mr Campbell ; and, as in the case of Professor Simson, they appointed the matter *to rest here*. This mild deliverance they followed up with a recommendation to Professor Campbell, and to all ministers and teachers of divinity whatsoever, within the national church, “ to be cautious in their preach-

ing and teaching, or writing, not to use doubtful expressions or propositions, which may be constructed in an erroneous sense, or lead the hearers or readers into error, however sound such words or propositions may be in themselves, or however well intended, but to hold fast the form of sound words.”*

Whatever hopes of a reunion might linger in the bosoms of any of the Seceding brethren, previous to the meeting of the Assembly in 1736, these appear to have been completely dissipated by the proceedings of that Assembly. Even Mr Wilson was now quite prepared to go along with his brethren, in performing acts of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. After waiting for nearly three years, and seeing little or no prospect of a reformation taking place within the national church, the path of duty now seemed to be clear to him, which was, to preach the gospel wherever an opening should be presented to him in providence, and to adopt, in connexion with his brethren, such other measures as might be necessary for giving relief to those who were anxiously soliciting the benefits of a gospel ministry from the Secession.

During this summer, Mr Wilson and Mr Fisher, took a journey into the west of Scotland, where a considerable interest had already been excited by the events which had taken place. In the course of their excursion, they paid a visit to Dalry. Mr Wilson having, in early life, received a call to labour in this parish, the people felt a strong attachment to him, and earnestly requested him to preach to them on the present occasion. With this request Mr Wilson cheerfully complied. “A tent was erected, and a vast multitude assembled to hear him preach. Towards the conclusion of the sermon, the patron of the parish, riding home in that direction from his usual place of worship, came to the spot, and on seeing the crowd inquired what it meant. Being informed that the people were listening to the ministers of the Secession, who had come there to preach, he joined the assembly, and heard the remaining part of the sermon. When the worship was concluded, he introduced himself to

* Acts of Assembly 1736.

the two ministers, and engaged them to breakfast with him next morning. This gentleman had a preacher of the established church, residing in his family as tutor or chaplain. On returning home, he told him that he had been hearing the Seceder ministers, and had been vastly pleased with them, and that they were coming next morning to breakfast, when he wished to have all the points of difference between them and his church fully discussed. The chaplain, however, left the house in the morning, before Messrs Wilson and Fisher arrived, and did not return till they were gone. The patron afterward upbraided him for his cowardice, saying, that the Assembly had cast out these able and excellent men, and that he, convinced of their innocence, durst not venture to face them.”*

Applications to the Associate Presbytery, for sermon, now rapidly increased. Some of these were from remote districts of the country. At their meeting in November 1736, a letter was sent to them from several societies in connexion with the old dissenters in the south-west districts of Scotland, stating their destitute condition since the death of Mr John Hepburn, and requesting that the Presbytery would do something for their relief. A similar application was received at this meeting, from no fewer than 280 families in Lisbourne, in Ireland. The petitioners complained that the presbytery within whose bounds they resided, had intruded upon them a minister contrary to their choice, and they requested that they might be received into the communion of the Secession, and that a properly qualified person should be sent to break amongst them the bread of life.† To both of these applications the Presbytery gave encouraging answers.

* Ferrier's Memoirs of the Rev. W. Wilson, p. 306.

† In a note to Ferrier's Memoir of the Rev. W. Wilson (p. 381), we have the following account of the manner in which the Secession was first introduced into Ireland. It illustrates the wisdom of Divine Providence, in making the most common-place events productive of great and lasting good. “The father of the late Rev. W. Jamieson, of Kilwinning, was a sea-faring man; and, in the course of his business, had occasion to touch at one of the sea-ports in the north of Ireland. From the well known sympathies of similar minds, the religious sailor soon found himself in intercourse with some of the

Though the brethren had been in the habit of occasionally preaching in places where the people invited them, yet, from motives of delicacy, and with a view to show that they were not rash in their proceedings, they had hitherto refrained from licensing young men to preach the gospel, even though they had been frequently importuned by the people to do so. Now, however, they began to turn their attention seriously to this subject. Having renounced all hopes of a reunion with the church, they considered it a duty imperative on them, to adopt measures for extending and perpetuating the benefits of the Secession. Accordingly, on the 4th of November, the Presbytery took this subject under their serious consideration, and a motion was made that one of the brethren be appointed to take the inspection of youth to be trained up for the holy ministry. Messrs Erskine and Moncrieff were appointed a committee to prepare an overture, which should regulate the Presbytery's procedure in this important matter. On the following day, these brethren gave in their report, and submitted to the consideration of the Presbytery the following overture:—"Considering the lamentable and desolate condition of many parishes in Scotland, by reason of the violent intrusions that have been made upon them, and likewise considering the frequent and repeated applications to this Presbytery, from several quarters of the land, for sending forth labourers into the Lord's vineyard, that so they might have the benefit of the gospel, and the ordinances thereof, therefore the committee are of opinion that this Presbytery should make some step towards the relief of the Lord's oppressed heritage, especially consi-

religious people in the town. At that time, arminianism seemed to be making similar progress among the presbyterians in Ireland, as it was making in Scotland. He reported to his friends in that country, the determined stand which had been made in the General Assembly in Scotland, and the Secession, which had, in consequence, taken place. The result of their intercourse, and of his communications, was an agreement on the part of the Irish, immediately to apply to the Associate Presbytery to *come over and help them*. It was by this apparently fortuitous occurrence, from this small and precious seed, borne by the winds, that the Secession in Ireland has sprung up, and branched out into its present magnitude."

dering the loud call in Providence thereto, by nominating and appointing one of their number to take the inspection of the youth that should offer themselves to be trained up for the holy ministry, and also that every one of the brethren should carefully look out for faithful men, to whom the ministry should be committed."*

After some discussion as to whether the question should now be finally determined, or the farther consideration of it be delayed till next meeting, this overture was unanimously adopted : And the Presbytery having proceeded to the choice of a Professor, Mr Wilson was with one voice appointed to the important charge. The choice could not have fallen on an individual better qualified, in every respect, for training up young men for the office of the ministry. Mr Wilson had received the best education which the Scottish Universities could furnish. His natural talents were excellent ; and they had been thoroughly improved by a course of intense study in the early period of his life. He was possessed of the most amiable dispositions ; and his character stood high in the country for integrity and disinterestedness. And to crown the whole, he was a person of the most ardent piety, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge of the Scriptures. Such was the person to whom the Presbytery entrusted the training up of candidates for the ministry.

At a subsequent meeting, Mr Wilson announced, that he would commence his course of theological tuition in the ensuing spring ; that the months of March, April, and May, would be devoted by him to that purpose ; and, in the meantime, the brethren gave notice to their correspondents in the different societies throughout the kingdom, that they would receive into their seminary students who were properly recommended. To show that the first ministers of the Secession were not the illiterate men whom some have supposed them to be, it may be proper here to state, that an intimate knowledge of the Latin language was necessary on the part of those who attended Mr Wilson's prelections, as he not only

* Minutes of the Associate Presbytery.

read his lectures, but conducted the whole business of his class in that language.

In the month of December, the Presbytery gave their final sanction to a document, the preparation and revising of which had occupied no small portion of their time during several meetings. This was "An Act, Declaration, and Testimony for the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Church of Scotland." To distinguish it from the first Testimony which the Presbytery published, this production has generally been known by the name of the *Judicial Testimony*. The Presbytery did not intend, by this publication, to exhibit anew the grounds of the Secession; this they had already clearly and fully done in their former publications. Neither was it designed by them as a new standard of church communion; nor was it ever placed by them on a level with the Confession of Faith, and those other subordinate standards which they already possessed. Though a general approbation of it was required of those who acceded to them, yet it was no bar in the way of persons being admitted to their communion, if they declared that they could not assent to the truth of all the historical statements which it contained. A much more extensive course of reading than most of the people possessed, would have been necessary to have enabled them to form an accurate and enlightened judgment of the historical statements which the Testimony contained; and it would have been foolish in the Presbytery to have required the people to give an assent to the truth of such statements, as a term of their admission to the privileges of the church. With this folly, however, the Presbytery were not chargeable. Multitudes were admitted by them who declared that they could not give any such assent; and ministers were ordained by them who made the same declaration.

The object of the Presbytery in publishing their Judicial Testimony, was to declare to the world what God had done for the Church of Scotland during former periods of her history; to condemn the manifold defections with which she

had been latterly chargeable ; to vindicate and establish the truth, in opposition to prevailing errors ; and to stir up, among all classes, a greater zeal for the purity of religion, and for the maintenance of the cause of Christ. In the introduction, they express themselves in the following terms on this subject: They say, that “ they judge a testimony of this kind necessary for the information of the present generation, who have generally lost the knowledge both of what God had done for Scotland, and of the grounds and causes of his righteous quarrel and controversy against us ; necessary for the conviction and humiliation of all ranks of persons ; necessary to preserve and maintain the truths of God, and an useful mean to transmit them to following generations in their purity.”

Mr Wilson, on whom had devolved the greatest share of the labour in preparing the second Testimony, when defending it against the attacks of Mr Currie, gives the following account of the place which this document was designed to hold amongst the official publications of the Presbytery, and of the uses which it was intended to serve :—“ In the Act and Testimony of the Associate Presbytery, our received standards of doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, are particularly applied and laid against the errors that have sprung up in this church, and against such corruptions and defections as have taken place therein, by which our subordinate standards have been either obscured or perverted as to their genuine sense and meaning, and by which also palpable deviations have been made from them. Hence, in the assertory part of the Act and Testimony, the truths asserted are viewed as agreeable to the Word of God, the supreme standard, and also as agreeable to our subordinate standards. Again, in the condemnatory part of the Act and Testimony, the errors, corruptions, or defections condemned, are viewed as contrary to the Word of God, and our subordinate standards, received and adopted by this church in her reforming times ; therefore the Act and Testimony of the Associate Presbytery is not a new standard of church communion, far less is it to be equalled

with our received standards; but it is an application and declaration of their genuine sense and meaning, in opposition to the errors, defections, and corruptions that have prevailed both in former and present times." *

Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the merits of this production, few will be inclined to question, that the object which the Presbytery had in view, in publishing it, was good; and, from the interest which was excited, by the publication of it, amongst a large portion of the people, there is reason to believe that most beneficial effects were produced by it. By means of it, men's eyes were opened to see the errors and defections that prevailed; they were led to humble themselves on account of their iniquities, by which the wrath of God had been provoked; they were stirred up to contend earnestly for the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus; the progress of corruption was checked, error was exposed, and practical godliness was revived to a considerable extent among the people. Whilst, however, the Judicial Testimony deserves to be spoken of in laudatory terms, on account of the general tenor of its statements; and while it was calculated to be useful, on account of its directing public attention to the prevailing evils of the day; while at the same time it gave a faithful and luminous exhibition of the truth, there are several things in it unworthy of the excellent men who penned it. Amongst the number of those evils, for instance, which they deplore and condemn, they mention the union betwixt England and Scotland, the toleration granted in the reign of Queen Anne, and the repeal of the penal statutes against witches. Let not my readers smile at the simplicity of the Seceders in testifying against these things, as national evils; for the sentiments which they entertained on these points, were not peculiar to them; they were held by them in common with a considerable portion of the Church of Scotland. The Commission of the General Assembly remonstrated against certain clauses in the treaty of union, on the ground that, if the Scottish na-

* Wilson's Defence (continuation), p. 148.

tion agreed to them, they would thereby be guilty of *homologating* the English hierarchy and its ceremonies : and when addressing Queen Anne on the subject of the toleration, they make use of the most lugubrious language. They say “it is such as gives a large license almost to all error and blasphemy ; throws up all good discipline, to the dishonour of God, and the scandal and ruin of the christian religion.”

The publication of the Testimony tended considerably to widen the breach betwixt the Seceders and the popular party in the national church. Hitherto they had been in the habit of assisting one another at sacramental occasions ; but after this period, this friendly intercourse appears for the most part to have been given up. With the exception of Mr Wardlaw of Dunfermline, and Mr Hamilton of Stirling, and probably one or two more, the Seceding brethren and the brethren of the Establishment were so far alienated from one another, that they had now little or no ministerial intercourse. The Judicial Testimony of the Presbytery was keenly attacked by one who had formerly been in habits of friendship with them. This assailant was Mr John Currie, minister of Kinglassie, who stood forth as the great champion of the national church, and exerted all the ability of which he was master, to demolish the infant cause of the Secession. Mr Currie’s attack produced one good effect ; it called forth from the pen of Mr Wilson a most able, learned, and christian defence of the Presbytery. If all controversial writings had been conducted with the same candour, and the same good temper, as this excellent defence, it would have been well for the church and the world. With such an antagonist as Mr Wilson opposed to him, we need not wonder that Mr Currie’s efforts to arrest the progress of the Secession, should have been ineffectual. The Secession prospered in spite of all his attempts to write it down. His labours, however, were not altogether profitless to himself ; for the Assembly, in consideration of his good services, in attempting to demolish the Secession by means of his controversial pamphlets, granted him the sum of £ 61 sterling. Thus, if

he did not acquire much fame by his writings, they procured for him something still more substantial.

About this period, an event took place which, though properly belonging to civil history, yet, on account of the influence which it had upon the progress of the Secession, deserves to be recorded. One Wilson, a native of Kirkcaldy, in Fife, having been extensively engaged in smuggling transactions, was at length caught in one of his illegal adventures, and goods to a considerable amount were seized by the revenue officers. Resolved to recover, if not the property which had been taken from him, at least a remuneration for it, he, along with an associate of the name of Robertson, watched the collector on his return from one of his rounds, and breaking into the room where he slept, robbed him of money to an equal amount with the goods which he had lost. Both Wilson and his companion were apprehended that same evening; and being soon after tried, they were sentenced to be executed. Smuggling, at that period, was scarcely regarded as a crime, and a strong feeling of sympathy was excited on account of the fate of the condemned individuals.

Before the day of execution arrived, an occurrence took place which rendered Wilson a great favourite with the populace. It was then customary for those under sentence of death to be conducted to the Tolbooth church, to hear sermon upon Sabbath. Wilson, intent upon saving the life of his fellow-prisoner, who had been brought into his present unhappy situation chiefly through Wilson's instrumentality, availed himself of one of these occasions, for the purpose of accomplishing his rescue. They were guarded by three soldiers. Wilson, watching his opportunity, caught hold of a soldier with each hand, and, after having called upon his companion to run, he seized upon the third with his teeth, and being a person of great muscular power, he held the whole fast until Robertson made his escape; when, without making any farther effort, he calmly resigned himself to his fate. The audience, struck with admiration

at such an uncommon display of courage, so far from making any attempt to impede Robertson's flight, rather opened a way for him to escape. Wilson's exploit became the theme of universal discourse, and the feelings of the people were so strongly excited on his behalf, that serious apprehensions were entertained by the magistrates, lest an attempt would be made to rescue him on the day of execution. To prevent this, the city-guard, under the command of Captain John Porteous, was mustered in all its force : three rounds of shot were given to each man ; and regular troops were admitted into the city, that they might be ready to act, should there be any occasion for their co-operation. No disturbance ensued during the time of the execution ; but when the dead body was about to be cut down, a shower of stones from the populace exasperated the guard. Porteous ordered them to fire upon the crowd ; the result of which was, that several lives were lost, and a number of persons wounded. Popular indignation was roused to a high pitch against Captain Porteous, on account of this rash act ; he was accused of the murder of his fellow-citizens, and, a precognition being taken, he was that evening committed to the tolbooth, to await his trial. The charge was afterwards substantiated against him, and he was condemned to be executed. A number of gentlemen, however, pitying his fate, and looking upon him as having been harshly dealt with, drew up a statement of his case, and presented a petition to the crown for mercy. The queen, who then acted as regent in the absence of her husband George II., granted a reprieve of six weeks, to allow time for proper inquiry to be made.

This act of royal clemency roused the fury of the populace beyond all bounds, and rather than that the unhappy Porteous should escape, they resolved to take the execution of the law into their own hands. On the evening, previous to the day on which his sentence was to have been carried into effect, a tumultuous mob assembled ; and having secured the city gates, cut off the communication from the castle, and mastered the town-guard, they set fire to the door of the

prison ; and having dragged Porteous from his cell, they conducted him to the usual place of execution and hanged him over a dyer's pole, regardless of his cries for mercy. After having performed this bloody deed the mob dispersed, and left the streets as quiet as if nothing had taken place.

Such a daring outrage, committed in defiance of all law, and almost in the face of the magistrates, excited universal astonishment. When the government received intelligence of it, they were filled with the highest indignation, and the most prompt and vigorous measures were adopted to discover the perpetrators, and to bring them to punishment. A reward of two hundred pounds was offered for the discovery of any of the individuals concerned in the business. It was more than insinuated that the magistrates had connived at the matter ; the Lord Provost was declared incapable of ever after holding any office, and it was with the utmost difficulty that some of the most influential Scottish noblemen in parliament could prevent a bill from passing, depriving the city of Edinburgh of its charter, destroying her gates, and taking away her town guard. The Duke of Argyle, in a speech which he made on the occasion, with the view of saving the credit of the magistrates, wickedly attempted to fasten suspicion upon the Seceding ministers, as if they had been instrumental in stirring up a spirit of disaffection among the people :—" Great insinuations, my lords," observed the noble Duke, " have been made, that this and many other tumults that have frequently happened in the United Kingdom, have been owing to the oppression of the magistrate. For my part, my lords, I have heard of no particular acts of oppression, and I believe I may venture to say, neither have any of your lordships, as we must all have done, if any such had been. But, my lords, can riots proceed from no other cause, but from oppression in the magistrate ? Have people no other motives but the suggestions of despair ? I believe, my lords, we may find from the history of past times, that they have always had, and from the experience of the present, that they still continue to have, other motives.

“ This riotous and rebellious spirit of theirs does not proceed from any oppression of the governors, or civil magistrates of that country, as has been strongly insinuated, but from a few fanatical preachers lately started up in that country, who, by their sermons and other ways, instil into the minds of the vulgar and ignorant such enthusiastical notions as are inconsistent with all government, by making sedition and rebellion a principle of their religion. From this cause, I am inclined to think, the tumult at Edinburgh proceeded, and to this is owing that ill judged fidelity of the guilty toward one another, by which the secret before the execution was made impenetrable, and by which the discovery of the persons concerned has since been rendered impossible. But of the inhabitants of Edinburgh, I am convinced, there are very few tainted with these principles, because they seldom or never hear such doctrine.”*

Never were insinuations more vile or unfounded thrown out against any class of men, than these which his Grace of Argyle threw out against the Seceders; they were unsupported by even the shadow of evidence, and if his Grace had no other way of accounting for the Porteous riot, except by injuring the characters of innocent men, it would have been much better for him to have remained silent. There is no reason to believe, that any of the Scottish clergy were connected, either directly or indirectly, with such brutal proceedings; and as for those belonging to the Secession, they were men of acknowledged worth and piety; their moral conduct was, in the highest degree, exemplary, so that even their worst enemies were not able to fix a stain upon it; they were conscientiously attached to the constitution of their country; and, as we shall have occasion to notice in the course of this narrative, both in their ecclesiastical and in their individual capacity, they showed a uniform willingness to strengthen the hands of government.

With the view of discovering the persons concerned in the murder of Captain Porteous, an act was passed which excit-

* Struthers' History of Scotland, Vol. II. p. 39.

ed great dissatisfaction in the country, amongst both ministers and people. This act required, that all who had fled, through fear of being suspected, should deliver themselves up, upon pain of suffering death if they should afterward be apprehended. Persons concealing any of these fugitives were also, upon conviction, to suffer death : offenders, who should give evidence against any of their accomplices, were to be pardoned ; and any person giving information that should lead to the conviction of any of the criminals, was to receive the sum of two hundred pounds. But the most obnoxious part of the act, so far as the clergy were concerned, was, that all the ministers of Scotland were required to read this act from the pulpit, during the time of divine service, on the first Sabbath of every month, during a whole year : and any minister, refusing to do so, was, for the first offence, to be declared incapable of sitting or voting in any church judicatory ; and, for the second, to be declared incapable of “ taking, holding, or enjoying any ecclesiastical benefice in Scotland.”

A great number of the ministers refused to read this act, chiefly on the following grounds ;—That some parts of the act were inconsistent with the principles of justice ; that it did not form any part of their ministerial work, as heralds of the gospel of peace, to proclaim the sanguinary laws of men ; that they did not recognise any right, which the king and parliament had, to dictate to them what duty they were to perform, during the time of divine service ; and above all, that it would have been surrendering the liberties and privileges of the church, to have acknowledged the principle obviously implied in the penalty annexed to the act, viz. that the king and parliament had the power of suspending and deposing ministers, or, in other words, of administering ecclesiastical discipline. To have admitted this principle would have been an homologating of erastianism in its most offensive form ; it would have been surrendering the power of inflicting church censure into the hands of those who had no right, by the laws of Christ, to exercise it.

On these grounds, did many of the ministers of Scotland refuse to read the Porteous act. The greater part of the ministers, however, read it in either one form or another. Some made no scruple about reading the whole of it; others endeavoured to compromise the matter with their conscience, by reading only a part. Some read it during the whole year, and others during only a part of the year. In some instances, they read it to empty benches; for in certain districts the people were so highly indignant, that they would not remain in the church during the time that the minister was employed in reading the act. So displeased were they with those ministers that complied, that they would not even hear them preach, but attended the ministry of those who refused to read; or, as not unfrequently happened, connected themselves with the Secession.* It does not appear that any attempt was made to carry into effect the penalty of the law against such of the ministers as were contumacious: none were deprived of their office for refusing to read. In this respect, government gave a proof of its wisdom, as any attempt to enforce compliance with such an unpopular act, would have roused the country into a flame, and been productive of the most disastrous effects. The applications made to the Associate Presbytery, during the period of these commotions, were numerous. Their conduct, in reference to the act which agitated the country, was firm and dignified. They not only refused compliance with it, but boldly condemned it as an unwarrantable encroachment upon the headship of Christ,—as a thrust aimed at the freedom and independence of his spiritual kingdom. The General Assembly afterwards ungenerously attempted to fasten upon them the charge of disaffection, in consequence of their making such a manly avowal

* It is reported of a minister in the south of Scotland, who had more of the wag than the martyr in him, that, being desirous to maintain himself in the good graces both of the government and of the people, he endeavoured to compromise the matter betwixt them, in the following manner. He gave the people a hint to leave the church, before he commenced reading the act, by telling them that, though the law made it imperative on him to read the act, yet there was no clause in it making it imperative on them to sit and hear it read.

of their sentiments ; but this charge the brethren successfully repelled ; and, both in their publications, and also by their loyal peaceable behaviour, they gave the most satisfactory evidence of their being warmly attached to the constitution of their country, and to the family that sat upon the throne.

CHAPTER III.

Accession of Messrs Thomas Mair and Ralph Erskine to the Associate Presbytery. Declaration of these brethren. Adherents of the Secession form themselves into societies for prayer and religious conference. Questions proposed to the Presbytery concerning terms of communion. Lesly and his adherents excommunicated. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1737. Contendings of the people at Denny. Violent settlement at Muckhart. Act of the Associate Presbytery asserting the right of popular election. Numerous petitions presented for a supply of sermon. The Presbytery resolves to license young men. Formula of questions adopted. Messrs Hunter and Clarkson entered on trials for license. Their declaration concerning the civil magistrate. Mr Hunter licensed. The General Assembly alarmed at the rapid progress of the Secession. A libel put into the hands of the Seceding brethren. The Presbytery publish the libel, with answers. Resolve to appear at the bar of the Assembly. An act of declinature prepared. Outline of this act. Proceedings of the General Assembly in 1739. The act of declinature read at the bar of the Assembly, by the moderator of the Presbytery. Overture concerning the Seceding brethren. Adopted by the Assembly. Remarks on the overture. Sentence of deposition pronounced. Remarks on the sentence. Conduct of the magistrates toward the Seceding ministers, after their deposition. The church doors closed against Mr E. Erskine and Mr Wilson. These brethren preach in the open air. Interesting scenes.

WHEN the Associate Presbytery met in the month of February 1737, their hands were strengthened by the accession of two new members. These were the Rev. Thomas Mair, of Orwell, and the Rev. Ralph Erskine, of Dunfermline. These two brethren, as has been mentioned in a preceding

part of the narrative, were present at the formation of the Presbytery, and had all along taken a deep interest in its proceedings; and, if they had remained longer in the national church than their brethren, this was owing to their cherishing the hope that, through the exertions of the faithful party, such a reformation might be accomplished in the judicatories of that church, as would remove all grounds of the Secession. After waiting for some years, and finding that there was little prospect of this hope being realized, they now deemed it their duty to take a more decisive step, and to cast in their lot with the brethren who had already seceded. When the Presbytery met, the moderator stated to them, that this meeting had been called at the special request of Mr Mair, who had something of importance to communicate; and Mr Mair being called upon, presented a paper, entitled, "Declaration of Secession from the present judicatories of the Church of Scotland," &c. This paper contained an account of Mr Mair's reasons for withdrawing from the national church, and connecting himself with the Presbytery. These reasons were substantially the same as those which had been already published by the Presbytery.

After Mr Mair had read his paper, Mr Ralph Erskine signified his adherence to the statements which it contained; and presented, at the same time, a written declaration, containing some additional reasons. In this declaration Mr Erskine stated (and Mr Mair acquiesced in the same sentiments), that though he withdrew, for the present, from the national church, and joined his brethren of the Secession, yet he did not by this intend withdrawing from ministerial communion with those pious ministers of the establishment, who were "groaning under, or wrestling against, the defections of the times." "Neither," said he, "do I hereby intend to preclude myself from the liberty of returning and joining with the judicatories of this church, upon their returning to their duty; and, so far as my joining with the foresaid, or any other ministers, in their lifting up the said testimony, and promoting the end and design thereof, and

the said return can consist together; seeing if the judicatories, who at present either unjustly refuse, or unduly delay to receive that testimony, were acting a contrary part, and putting hand to reformation, the same reasons that induce to this withdrawing, would necessarily induce to a returning, which I cordially wish I may quickly see good reason for." Such sentiments as these, which Mr Erskine expressed, were quite in unison with those entertained by all the members of the Presbytery, and which they had publicly avowed in their reasons of secession. Having received the declarations of the two brethren, they gave them a cordial welcome into their little band.

Almost all the adherents of the Secession, throughout the country, had formed themselves into associations for prayer and religious conference; and the correspondence of the Presbytery was chiefly carried on with these societies. Not having yet licensed any young men to preach the gospel, it was comparatively few of the applications for sermon that they were able to answer. The consequence of which was, that those who were connected with these societies were under the necessity either of meeting by themselves for religious exercise on the Sabbath, or of attending the ministrations of such evangelical ministers, belonging to the Establishment, as might be in their neighbourhood. The Presbytery did not disapprove of the conduct of those who did so, as they themselves had declared their willingness to hold communion with these faithful ministers; it was not from such that they had made a secession. Some of the members of these societies, however, began to take higher ground, and to question the lawfulness of Seceders giving any countenance to ministers connected with the Established Church, however pious and eminent they might be. One of the district societies in Edinburgh withdrew from the correspondence of the rest on this ground; and, after some altercation the matter was referred to the Presbytery. A paper containing a variety of questions, with regard to the terms of ministerial and christian communion, was presented to them. Of these questions the following is

a specimen :—“ Whether one can make secession from the Established Church, and yet hold communion with those who are her members, whether they be ministers or private christians ?” “ Whether the circumstance of these ministers or christians being gracious persons did in the least remove the offence taken from their joining with the corrupt Established Church ?” “ Whether refusing to join in the Testimony, if it be a term of communion, is not a reason of secession from such persons ?” The Presbytery, resolving themselves into a committee, took this paper into consideration, but avoided giving definite answers to the questions which it contained. They exhorted the societies in Edinburgh to endeavour to live at peace with one another, and not to attempt fixing the terms of ministerial or christian communion ; and they added, that the Presbytery would turn their attention to this subject as soon as convenient.

This society occasioned the Presbytery some farther trouble, for soon after this period, one of its leaders, a person of the name of Lesly, presented a paper, in which he disowned the civil government of the country, and intimated that it would be his duty, should an occasion present, to rise in arms against it. The Presbytery endeavoured to induce him to retract these sentiments ; but finding that he pertinaciously adhered to them, they laid him under the sentence of the lesser excommunication, and warned all the other members of the society to withdraw from him. Several of these, having imbibed similar sentiments, refused to comply, upon which they were suspended from their privileges as members of the church ; and after having harassed the Presbytery, for some time, with representations and petitions, they at length renounced their authority altogether, and formed a party of their own.

The General Assembly, in 1736, had declared it to be a principle of the Scottish church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation, and they had enjoined all presbyteries to have a regard to this principle in planting vacant congregations, “ as

they regarded the glory of God, and the edification of the body of Christ." After such a declaration as this, emitted by the supreme court, consistency required that every encouragement should be given by the General Assembly to presbyteries when endeavouring to carry this principle into effect, by preventing the settlement of ministers in opposition to the wishes of the congregation. If any proof were wanting to show, that, notwithstanding the declaration which had been thus made, for the purpose of soothing the irritated feelings of the people, there was no serious intention on the part of those who bore sway in the church to permit such an excellent principle to regulate the conduct of presbyteries; this proof will be found in the proceedings of the Assembly which met in 1737.* This Assembly had under

* I am not singular in the opinion, which I have expressed, that the Assembly of 1736 were not sincere in the enactment which they made "against the intrusion of ministers;" and that when they enjoined presbyteries to have regard to it in the planting of vacant congregations, they intended by this nothing more than merely to calm the irritation of the people. A writer of high respectability, whom none will accuse of being influenced either by hostility or prejudice against the national church, expresses the same opinion. The remarks which he makes (I believe unwittingly), upon the conduct of the Assembly at this time, do not give us a favourable view of its *honesty*. It tends greatly to strengthen the original grounds of the Secession, when we find such writers, under pretence of apologising for their church courts, representing them to be so dishonest as to make popular enactments for the purpose of obtaining the good opinion of the people, while they never seriously intended carrying such enactments into effect. The writer, to whom I refer, is the late Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, who, in his *Life of Dr Erskine*, mentions the act of 1736 as a highly favourable instance of the wish of the Assembly "to conciliate the spirit of the times." But most unfortunately for the credit of the Assembly, who passed this act, the Reverend Baronet, in the comments which he makes, represents it as *far from the intention* of that venerable body to follow it up by a train of authoritative decisions: he farther states, that an influential portion of the Assembly never regarded it in any other light, than as a concession to the prejudices of the people, and had not the most remote idea that it should influence their decisions in particular cases. "It is scarcely conceivable," he says, "that this act could have done more, than sooth the discontent of the people by conciliatory language; unless more could have been attempted, than perhaps was practicable; and unless it had been followed up by a train of authoritative decisions, *which was far from being intended*." "At the same time, it is equally evident, that the members of the church who had been most determined, in disregarding the opposition made to the induction of presentees, if

its review no fewer than four cases of contested settlements, and in all of them did they give decisions that were opposed to the principle of non-intrusion. The first case was that of Perth, where the magistrates and a portion of the inhabitants had given a call to Mr David Black, on the footing of the unpopular act of 1732, which had now been disannulled. Mr Black's settlement was opposed by the session and a majority of the heads of families, who had given a call to Mr Henry Lindsay of Bothkennar. The Assembly rejected the call to Mr Lindsay, and ordered the presbytery of Perth to proceed with Mr Black's settlement. The second case was that of the parish of Duffus, where one person having received a presentation from the patron, and another person having received a call from a number of the parishioners, the Assembly, forgetting the principle, "that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation," decided against the people, and in favour of the patron. They, moreover, ordered their moderator to write a letter to her Grace, the Duchess of Gordon, intimating to her this sentence, and expressing their high respect for herself and her noble family. The third case was that of the parish of Monikie, where the presbytery of Dundee refused to execute a sentence of the Commission, ordering them to proceed with the ordination of Mr George Johnston as minister of that parish. A complaint being made to the Assembly, they ordered the presbytery forthwith to carry the sentence into effect.

But the case of Denny affords a better illustration than any of the preceding ones, of the total disregard of popular right and popular feeling, which characterized the proceedings of the Assembly at that period. I shall here give, from an authentic source, a detailed account of this case, not so

they concurred in this enactment, as they seem to have done, could have intended it as nothing more, than a concession *in terminis*, to the prejudices of the people, *without any view to its influence on their decisions in particular cases*, or to such a change of system as could have had any practical effects."—*Appendix to Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine*, p. 449.

much on account of there being any thing extraordinary connected with it, as because it furnishes a fair specimen of the treatment which the people received from their ecclesiastical rulers in a great variety of instances, and also shows us what necessity there was for the Secession taking place at the time it did, that relief might be afforded to those who were groaning under such oppressive treatment.

The parish of Denny having become vacant by the death of their pastor, a presentation was given to Mr James Stirling; and the Laird of Herbertshire, who appears to have acted as patron on behalf of the crown, caused intimation to be made to the moderator of the presbytery of Stirling, that a presentation had been given and accepted, and requested that the presbytery would take the presentee on trials for ordination. The parishioners opposed this summary mode of proceeding, and petitioned that a moderation might be granted for the people at large, without any reference to the presentation given. From the presbytery the matter was carried to the synod of Perth and Stirling, who found that the presentation was null and void, on account of its not having been presented to any judicatory in due time, by any person having a commission from his Majesty for that purpose; and it was finally agreed, among all the parties concerned, that, the presentation being laid aside, a call should be moderated in the kirk of Denny. On the day of moderation, the former presentee was proposed on the part of the patron, and another candidate was proposed on the part of the people; and the roll of voters being called, few or none of the heads of families voted for the patron's candidate. Of the heritors, fifty-two gave him their support, and of these the greater part were either non-residenters, or not in the communion of the church; while for the popular candidate, there were seventy-four heritors, the whole of the session, and one hundred and thirty-eight heads of families. Though the voice of the parish was thus most unequivocally expressed against the presentee, and though the call given to the nominee of the people was, with the exception of the

heritors mentioned, almost unanimous, yet the two ministers who conducted the moderation refused to attest the call; they referred it to the presbytery, and the presbytery, without judging in it, referred it to the synod. The synod, after hearing all the parties, gave a decision, by a large majority, in favour of the parishioners, and ordered the presbytery to proceed with the settlement of the person whom they had called. Against this decision, the friends of the presentee protested, and carried the cause by appeal before the supreme court. The Assembly, either finding the business to be a troublesome one, or not having sufficient leisure to attend to it, remitted the settlement of it to their Commission. The Commission, always having on hand a superabundant supply of questions of this kind to occupy their attention, delayed the consideration of the Denny case till the next meeting of Assembly, during which time the people were obliged to exercise their patience. The Assembly at length gave the case a hearing; but instead of giving judgment, they again remitted it to the Commission. The Commission, after making several unsuccessful attempts to effect a reconciliation betwixt the parties, thought proper, at the close of one of their meetings, when the greater part of their members had gone away, and when there was scarcely a quorum of their number present, to reverse the sentence of the synod, and to order the settlement of the presentee to take place.

Against this sentence, the people, of course, reclaimed, and once more appeared at the bar of the Assembly, complaining of the injustice that had been done them. Their complaint was disregarded. The sentence of the Commission was affirmed, and the presbytery of Stirling was enjoined to take the necessary steps for ordaining the intruder. Yet, with singular inconsistency, the same Assembly, on the following day, agreed to an act, in which they declared, as if in mockery of their own proceedings, "that it is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation."

The business, however, did not stop here. The presbytery, as well as the people, proved refractory; and, like conscientious men, they refused to execute a sentence which was opposed both to Scripture, and to an avowed principle of their own church. This refusal, on the part of the presbytery, occasioned another complaint to be made to the Assembly by the presentee's friends. This venerable court, much more anxious to support their own dignity, than to do what they themselves had declared was "for the glory of God, and the edification of the body of Christ," were indignant that any inferior judicatory should presume to dispute their authority, even in a matter where conscience was concerned. They appointed a committee of twenty-one members to prepare an overture on this whole affair. At a subsequent sederunt, an overture, couched in strong language, was brought in, and approved of by a vote. It declared the dissatisfaction of the Assembly with the conduct of the presbytery, in neglecting or refusing to fulfil the appointment of the Assembly 1736; it enjoined the presbytery to proceed immediately with the trials of Mr Stirling, and to have the whole finished before the 1st of September next, as they should be answerable to the next Assembly; and, lest the presbytery should still prove contumacious, the synod of Perth and Stirling were ordered to take him upon trials, and to proceed, so as to have the settlement completed before the 1st of March; and it was declared not to be lawful for them to put any question whether they would obey the appointment or not, but any ten or more of them might proceed to ordain Mr Stirling, even though all the rest of their brethren should be opposed to the execution of the act. It was farther provided by the overture, that "in case the synod, or such number of them, as above mentioned, shall not, before the 1st of November next, enter upon trials the said Mr Stirling, or before the 1st of March next, finish the same, the Assembly empower a special Commission of this General Assembly, to convene at Edinburgh, in the Old Kirk Aisle, on the third Wednesday of November or March

respectively, with power to adjourn themselves as they shall think fit, in order to take trials, and ordain Mr Stirling as minister of Denny." *

Such was the overture which the venerable Assembly adopted for maintaining the authority of the supreme court, and with a view also to promote the peace and edification of the church. It is possible that the former of these objects might be gained by it; but how it could be accomplished, consistently with the latter, it is difficult to conceive. In the meantime, Mr Stirling, the presentee, died before his trials for ordination could be completed; and the people of Denny, in contending anew for the exercise of their christian privileges, were subjected to worse treatment than even that which they had already received. Upon an application made to the presbytery, a moderation was appointed to take place among them; one candidate was proposed on behalf of the few who had hitherto supported the claims of the patron, and another on behalf of the congregation; and when the votes were about to be taken,—such was the management of the day, by means of an advocate hired from Edinburgh for the purpose,—none of the elders were permitted to vote, on the ground that they were not qualified to the present civil government; the heads of families were denied the same privilege, inasmuch as it was alleged that they had no right to it, by the laws either of the church or of the state; and the votes also of heritors were refused, unless they were infefted in their possessions, and unless they paid cess. Notwithstanding these arbitrary measures, a call to the popular candidate was subscribed by a large majority of the congregation, and presented to the presbytery, at their first meeting, by whom it was rejected, while the call of their opponents was sustained, and their candidate ordered to be taken on trials for ordination. Against this decision the people protested, but did not think proper to appeal to any higher court, as their past experience had taught them

* Acts of Assembly 1737.

what treatment they might expect from the Assembly and their Commission.

The parishioners, however, were resolved that they would not tamely submit to the intruder. On the day set apart for the ordination, one hundred and seventeen heritors, elders, and heads of families, went publicly to the kirk of Denny, and after sermon, immediately before the imposition of hands, entered a solemn protest against the proceedings of the presbytery, declaring that the person whom they were now pretending to set apart to the office of the ministry, being intruded upon the parish contrary to the laws of Christ, was not, nor could be, regarded as lawful minister of the congregation, to whom they could submit in the Lord. Having made this declaration, and having taken instruments in the hand of a notary-public, they withdrew amid threats of being subjected to fine and imprisonment. Finding it impossible, consistently with a good conscience, to remain longer in a church, where the feelings and privileges of the people were thus trampled upon, they followed the example of many thousands of their countrymen, by renouncing the Establishment, and connecting themselves with the Secession, into the communion of which they were soon after this received. *

In a preceding part of the narrative, mention has been made of the people of Muckhart parish being the first who petitioned the Associate Presbytery for a supply of sermon. The case of this people was still more hard than even that

* For the greater part of the particulars contained in this part of the narrative concerning Denny, I have been indebted to a curious historical account, drawn up, not many years after these transactions took place, by some of the individuals concerned in them. The paper now referred to, was subscribed in "the new kirk of Denny" (now Denny-Loanhead), by a number of the parishioners, some time after they had been formed into a congregation, in connexion with the Secession. It gives a minute account of their past "contentings" and "wrestlings," and was prepared with a view to its being presented to the Associate Synod at Edinburgh, in 1749, to enforce the claims of the subscribers in the case of a competing call. It is preserved by the session of Denny-Loanhead, as an interesting relic of "the olden time;" and to the Rev. Dr Stark I hereby acknowledge my obligation, for having so politely favoured me with the use of it.

of Denny ; and the particulars of it are worthy of being put on record, in a history of the Secession, as presenting us with another glaring instance of the total disregard of popular right and popular feeling, which characterised the ecclesiastical proceedings of the Establishment at that period. This case was before the Assembly a few years prior to the present date of my narrative ; but I have purposely reserved the account of it, to be given along with that of Denny, as there is a considerable similarity betwixt the two, and as by being viewed in juxtaposition, they convey to the mind of the reader a more forcible impression of the deplorable condition, in a spiritual point of view, to which many of the parishes in Scotland were reduced by the tyrannical conduct of their ecclesiastical rulers.

The parish of Muckhart having become vacant by the removal of the Rev. Mr Wardrop to Whitburn, Mr Archibald Rennie received a presentation from the crown to the vacant charge ; and a call was appointed by the presbytery to be moderated in the usual form. On the day of moderation, only two individuals residing within the parish, and a non-resident heritor, subscribed the call : all the rest of the parishioners united in opposing the settlement. The presbytery of Auchterarder hesitated to proceed with the ordination, in the face of such a formidable opposition. The business was, of course, carried from the presbytery to the synod, and from the synod to the Assembly, where, after a litigation of two years, the usual deliverance was given—that the settlement of the intruder should take place ; and a committee of ministers from the neighbouring presbyteries was appointed to co-operate along with the presbytery of Auchterarder, in carrying this decision into effect. On the day appointed for the ordination, a strong body of the parishioners way-laid their intended minister and the deputation that accompanied him, on the confines of the parish, and, without offering any personal violence, conducted them back to the village of Dollar, where they kept them in safe custody till the day was so far advanced, that the settlement could

not take place ; when they permitted them to depart. Another day was appointed for the ordination, when more effectual measures were adopted to carry it into effect. A band of soldiers guarded the ministers to the place of worship,* and though the people were equally determined, as on the former occasion, to make opposition, they were overawed by the presence of the military, from proceeding to acts of violence. The church-door having been previously well secured, the ministers and those that accompanied them were obliged to make their entry by one of the windows ; and there, in the presence of empty pews, did they go through the forms of an ordination,—not a single individual connected with the parish being present, except two heritors and an episcopalian non-resident. To finish the solemnities of the day, several of the parishioners were taken prisoners, and were ordered to be confined in Castle Campbell, an ancient seat of the Argyle family, in ruins ; but, after a short while, they were permitted to return to their homes, on giving bail.

The Rev. Archibald Rennie, who was thus inducted into the pastoral charge of the parish of Muckhart, continued for upwards of half a century to possess the manse, to farm the glebe, and to pocket the stipend ; and, during the whole of that long period, he never had either an elder or a kirk-session, never made a single collection for the poor, never dispensed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and never, it is said, except on one occasion, entered the pulpit. The Secession having commenced soon after his settlement, the great body of the people joined it, and the few parishioners who attended his ministry,—seldom amounting to more

* The numerous contested settlements that took place at that period, rendered the attendance of a guard of soldiers frequently necessary at ordinations. On an occasion of this kind, where a party of English soldiers was on duty, one of them requesting instructions from the commanding officer, said he was afraid they should be obliged to fire. " Well," replied the officer, " if it must be so, the shortest way of settling the business, will be to make sure, in the first place, of the clergyman who occasions the disturbance."—*Christ. Rep.* vol. iv. p. 10.

than seven,—assembled for worship, upon Sabbath, in the manse.*

I have given somewhat minutely the particulars of the cases of Denny and Muckhart, for the purpose of showing how matters were managed in the Church of Scotland, at the time the Secession commenced. If these two cases had been insulated ones, they would scarcely have been worth mentioning, but they are to be regarded as affording a fair specimen of the treatment which not a few of the parishes received from the ecclesiastical courts, at that period. Any one who peruses the records of the General Assembly, will see how numerous were the instances of disputed settlements, that occupied the attention of that court, during the greater part of the eighteenth century. Some of the contests betwixt the patrons and the people were carried on for years, during which time the parishioners were kept in a constant tumult, and their spiritual interests in a great measure neglected; and, even after a struggle of years, how rarely did it happen that they succeeded in obtaining their object. It need excite no surprise, that the Secession, commencing in such circumstances, should have been hailed by a large portion of the people as a blessing; and that multitudes, shaking themselves free from the trammels of the Establishment, should have flocked with eagerness to her altars.

In consequence of the practice which prevailed to such a great extent within the national church, of imposing ministers upon congregations, contrary to the wishes of the people, the Associate Presbytery, at their meeting in January 1737, agreed to the following overture, in which they condemn said practice, and declare that the only principle recognized by them, in the appointment of office-bearers in the church, is that of popular election. “ Likewise, they acknowledge, assert, and declare, that ministers, and other office-bearers in the church, ought to be set over congregations by the call and consent of the majority of such in these

* This statement concerning Muckhart, is given on the authority of an individual well acquainted with the ecclesiastical history of that parish.

congregations, who are admitted to full communion with the church in all her sealing ordinances, and that there should be no preference of voices in this matter, upon the account of secular consideration, according to Acts i. 16, to the close of the chapter, Acts vi. 2-6, &c. with many other scriptures, and according to our books of discipline, and acts of Assembly, agreeable thereto ; and they reject and condemn all contrary principles, tenets, and practices, whereby the scripture rule and pattern in this important matter, is denied and rejected, and ministers are imposed upon dissenting and reclaiming congregations." *

Numerous applications for sermon were made to the Presbytery from all parts of the country. During the years 1737-8, upwards of seventy petitions were laid upon their table,† and some of them were from remote districts ; they were almost all sent from what were termed " corresponding societies," or associations formed among the people for prayer and religious conference. The general purport of these petitions was, expressing the dissatisfaction of the petitioners with the abuses that prevailed in the national church ; their acquiescence in the Testimony which had been published ; their desire to be taken under the superintendence of the Presbytery ; and a request that some of the

* Minutes of Presbytery.

† It may gratify some of my readers, to present them with the following list of places, from whence petitions were sent to the Presbytery, during the first years of the Secession, by societies desirous to be received into its communion.

During the year 1737, petitions were received from Newbattle, East Lothian, West Linton and neighbouring parishes, Carluke, Carstairs, Cambusnethan, Youllieside near Sanquhar, Morebattle, Balfron, Stitchell, Larbert, Dunipace, Cumbernauld, Kilsyth, Slamnan, Falkirk, East Monkland, Teviotdale, Northumberland, Torryburn, Leslie, Fenwick, St Andrew's ; and, during the year 1738, petitions were received from Gargunnoch, St Ninians, Arngask, Greenock, Strathmiglo, Ross, societies in the bounds of Dunblane presbytery, Yarrow, Markinch, Annandale, Mearns, Monimail, Leven, Auchtermuchty, Pathhead, Fossoway, Kilmacollm, Dundee, Aberdour, Kilmaurs, Stow, Dunning, Falkland, Kettle, Logie, Fisherrow, Flisk, Alloa, Ayr, Nithsdale, Knockrife, Airth, Tippermuir, Rhind, Kinnoul, Aberdalgie, Kinglassie, Fettercairn, Dalreoch, Glasgow, Denny, Skirling, Bridge of Allan, Drip, Dalkeith, Kilwinning, Avondale, Muthil, and Monzie.—*Minutes of Presbytery.*

brethren should come and hold a fast, and preach in those neighbourhoods where the petitioners resided, and also that the Presbytery should, as speedily as possible, license young men to preach the gospel, that thus the numerous stations which had joined the Secession, might be supplied with gospel ordinances. Besides these applications that were made to them for sermon, the Presbytery received an accession of two new members; these were the Rev. Thomas Nairn of Abbotshall, who joined the Presbytery, October 12. 1737, and the Rev. James Thomson of Burntisland, who acceded June 7, 1738.

Notwithstanding the additional members which the Presbytery had received, it was impossible that they could answer one-half of the applications made to them, without being almost constantly absent from their own charges. The distances to which they had to travel were great; the places which they had to visit were numerous; and the demands of the people were urgent. They, therefore, resolved to license some young men who might take part with them in their laborious work. Previous to their taking this important step, they appointed a committee to consider what questions ought to be put to the young men, before they should be taken on trials for license. This committee having given in their report, the following formula of questions was unanimously adopted; and it was farther agreed that the answers given to the questions, by candidates for the ministry, should be recorded.

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners?

2. Do you believe the whole doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, as received by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1647, and in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms; and will you maintain and defend the same against all contrary errors, and particularly against the errors of Professors Simson and Campbell?

3. Do you believe that Christ has appointed a particular form of government in his church, and that this form of government is not prelatic or congregational, but presbyterial, consisting in a subordination of sessions to presbyteries, of presbyteries to synods, of synods to general assemblies; and will you maintain and defend the same, together with the purity of worship received and practised in this church, against all prelatic, erastian, and sectarian errors?

4. Do you own the binding obligation of the national covenant of Scotland, particularly as explained in 1638, to abjure prelacy, and the five articles of Perth; and of the solemn league of the three kingdoms, particularly as renewed in Scotland in 1648, with an acknowledgment of sins; and will you study to prosecute the ends thereof?

5. Do you approve of the Act and Testimony emitted by the Associate Presbytery, as a testimony for truth, and against defections therefrom in former and present times; and do you, in your judgment, condemn the several steps of defection condemned therein?

6. Do you promise, in the spirit of meekness, to be subject to the admonitions of your brethren in the Lord, and to the associate presbyteries, and to follow the peace of the church, together with your brethren, and to follow no divisive course from the Covenanted Church of Scotland; and that you will not give yourself up to detestable neutrality with respect thereto, whatever danger or suffering you may be exposed to on that account?

7. Are love to Christ, and a desire to be useful in edifying the souls of men, your chief motives in entering on the work of the holy ministry, and no worldly motive whatever?

The three following questions were afterwards added to the formula, with a view to their being put to ministers at their ordination:—

8. Have you used any undue methods for procuring the call from this congregation?

9. Do you engage to rule your own family well, and to live an exemplary life before the flock of Christ?

10. Do you accept of, and close with, the call from this Associate congregation, and engage to perform the duties of a faithful pastor among them, in preaching the gospel, not with the enticing words of men's wisdom, in catechising, and in visiting the same from house to house? *

Mr John Hunter and Mr Andrew Clarkson, two young men who had been for some time engaged in studying divinity under Mr Wilson, were required to appear before the Presbytery in December 1737, that they might undergo examination, preparatory to their being admitted to trials for license. A committee having been appointed to converse with them for this purpose, they were required to state first what were their views respecting the civil magistrate and the constituted authorities of the country. The Moderator, addressing them, said, "That as the sentiments and practice of the several members of the Presbytery anent the civil magistrate, particularly the present king, and other inferior magistrates under him, were very well known, they thought it needful, before they took the ordinary steps towards licensing young men, as probationers for the holy ministry, to know their sentiments anent the civil magistrate; in regard several through the land, who profess to adhere to our covenanted reformation, judge themselves obliged to disown the authority of the civil magistrate since the Revolution." Mr Hunter, being called upon to state his sentiments on this point, declared, "That he did not approve of the act of parliament which imposed upon ministers of the gospel a form of prayer for the king and his family;—this he considered to be an erastian encroachment; but that he judged it to be his duty to pray for the king, and for all in authority, agreeably to the commandment of the Lord, by the apostle, 1 Tim. ii. 1-4; he considered it to be his duty, also, to submit and be subject to the authority of the present magistrates, supreme and subordinate, because of the Lord's commandment, *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the*

* Brown's MS.

Lord's sake. The present king," he said " had *jus humanum* to rule and govern, which should be avowed so long as he did not tyrannically persecute and oppress his subjects." And he farther added, "that he had no difficulty about praying for the king *nominatim*, having Scripture example for it in the people praying, *Bless King David.*"

Mr Clarkson stated, that his sentiments on these points were much the same as those which had now been expressed. They were then examined as to their knowledge in divinity, and their acquaintance with the controversies of the day ; and, lastly, with regard to their personal experience of the power of religion : and the Presbytery being satisfied with them in all these particulars, the questions of the above formula were proposed to them, after which they were admitted to trials for license.*

Mr Clarkson having formerly belonged to the followers of Mr M'Millan, or Societymen, a charge was brought against him, soon after this, by certain individuals, that notwithstanding the declaration which he had made to the Presbytery, his sentiments respecting the allegiance which he owed to the civil government, were the same as those which he held before he joined the Secession. The Presbytery appointed an inquiry to be made into this charge. Both Mr Clarkson and his accusers were required to appear before them. The latter did not appear to substantiate their charge, and the former was required to state explicitly, in writing, what were his sentiments on the point referred to. With Mr Clarkson's statement the Presbytery were not al-

* The present practice of presbyteries in the Secession, in proposing the questions of the formula to young men, at the time of their receiving license, differs somewhat from the practice of the Fathers of the Secession. They proposed the formula to the young men *before* admitting them to trials for license. *Now*, the practice universally followed is, to propose the questions of the formula, *after* all the trials are completed. Would it not be better to revert to the old practice, and to propose the questions to candidates for the ministry, before admitting them to trials ? Because, on the supposition that they are not willing to assent to the formula, it must surely be better to know this before the trial discourses have been received, than after, inasmuch as a good deal of unnecessary trouble would thereby be saved both to the young men, and also to the presbytery.

together satisfied, and they agreed that they would not proceed any farther with his trials at present : At a future period, however, he was permitted to resume them, in consequence of his making a renunciation of the obnoxious sentiments which he had held respecting the civil magistrate.* Mr Hunter, the other student, after having finished his trials, to the satisfaction of the Presbytery, became the first licentiate of the Secession Church, and appears to have been both an acceptable and a useful preacher.

The popularity of the Seceding ministers, and the numerous adherents which they were gaining to their cause, in every part of the country, excited both jealousy and alarm on the part of the ecclesiastical rulers in the Establishment ; and it was resolved, that, if they did not renounce their " disorderly practices," in preaching the gospel to their fellow-sinners, wherever an opportunity of doing so was presented to them, stronger measures would be adopted to silence them. Accordingly, when the General Assembly met in May, 1738, in consequence of a representation sent up from the synod of Perth and Stirling, and instructions from the synod of Fife, respecting the conduct of the Seceding brethren, it was agreed that this subject should be fully considered in a committee of the whole house. The result of this deliberation was, that the Assembly found that these brethren had seceded from the church without any justifiable grounds, and continued in a state of secession, notwithstanding the clemency shown them in 1734 ; that they had erected

* The anxiety of the Presbytery to ascertain that the persons whom they licensed to preach the gospel, entertained proper views of the allegiance which they owed to their king, and to all who were invested with authority over them, shows how unfounded was the slander which their enemies attempted to raise against them, when they endeavoured to hold them up as objects of jealousy to the civil rulers, by representing them as disaffected to the government of their country. Nothing could be more wicked than such an attempt ; for, if these good men had any fault at all on this point, it appears rather to have inclined to an opposite extreme. Their conduct, both in public and in private, so far from furnishing any ground for the charge of disloyalty, seems rather to have been tintured with what, according to the vocabulary of the present day, would have been called *ultra loyalty*.

themselves into a presbytery, and exercised a judicial presbyterial power, not only over their own congregations, but over the whole church ; that they had “ framed and published to the world a printed paper, called their *Act, Declaration, and Testimony*,” and had emitted, besides, other papers of an improper kind ; that they had not confined their ministerial labours to their own congregations, but had dispensed religious ordinances to persons of other congregations without the knowledge and consent of the ministers to which they belonged ; that, with the view of promoting their “ dangerous schism,” they received at their presbyterial meetings all persons who chose to accede to them from other congregations, and for the same purpose appointed fasts to be held in different parts of the country, “ at which several thousands of persons of both sexes resorted ;” and, finally, that they had appointed one of their number to teach divinity, and had taken some persons under probationary trials for the ministry.

On all these grounds, the Assembly did “ unanimously resolve, declare, and enact, That although, upon these and other such accounts, this church might now proceed, in the due exercise of discipline, to appoint these seceding and separating brethren, and their followers, to be proceeded against and censured according to the demerit of their faults ; yet this Assembly, choosing rather still to treat them in the spirit of meekness, brotherly love, and forbearance, did, and hereby do, enjoin all the ministers of this national church, as they shall have access, and especially the ministers of the synods and presbyteries within which these seceding brethren reside, to be at all pains, by conference and other gentle means of persuasion, to reclaim and reduce them to their duty, and the communion of this church ; and all presbyteries and synods to report their diligence and success, and what they can learn or observe concerning the future behaviour of these brethren, to the Commission to be appointed by the Assembly, at any of the diets thereof ; which Commission is hereby authorized and appointed to take such

reports or representations, with those already made to this Assembly, under their consideration, and if they shall see cause, to take all proper steps and methods for duly sisting the separating brethren above named, before the next Assembly, to answer for their irregular conduct, and all the parts thereof. And the said Commission is also empowered to do what they shall think proper, to prepare and ripen the case for the decision of that Assembly."

In addition to the above, the General Assembly earnestly recommended it to all the ministers, elders, and members of the church, to endeavour, in their respective stations, and by all proper means, to reclaim "these poor deluded people," who had been carried away by this division, and to prevent the increase of a schism, "so dangerous to the peace of this church, so contrary to the spirit of the gospel, so very hurtful to religion and serious godliness, to christian charity and brotherly love." *

The efforts that were made, in compliance with these admonitions of the supreme court, "to reduce to their duty" the Seceding ministers, and to reclaim, "the poor deluded people," who had been carried away by them, proved unsuccessful: And the Assembly's Commission, at their meeting in November, resolved that a libel should be drawn up, and served on each of the brethren. The Presbytery having received intelligence of what was intended, made preparations for the approaching storm. They appointed a general fast to be held, by all the praying societies connected with them, "on account of the designs of the Established Church against the brethren, and the testimony in their hand." In the month of March, 1739, each of the members of the Presbytery had a copy of the libel served upon him; and they were all summoned to appear at the bar of the ensuing General Assembly, to answer for their conduct. The libel charged them with making an unwarrantable Secession from the church; with forming themselves into a presbytery, and exercising judicial presbyterial power; with emitting an Act,

* Acts of Assembly 1738.

Declaration, and Testimony, condemning the church and the judicatories thereof; with leaving their own parishes, and dispensing ordinances to persons of other congregations; with ordaining elders in other parishes than their own; with appointing fasts in different parts of the country; with taking several persons under probationary trials, and licensing one or more of them to preach the gospel; and with particular acts of offence under these general heads.

This libel the Presbytery published, with answers to all the particular charges which it contained; and at a meeting, held at Culfargie on the 13th of April, it was agreed that they would appear at the bar of the Assembly, and give in a formal declinature of the authority of that court. Messrs Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher were appointed to prepare a draught of the declinature, which they were to have in readiness to submit to the Presbytery at their next meeting. When the Presbytery met at Edinburgh, in the following month, this draught was laid upon the table in the form of an act “finding and declaring that the present judicatories of the national church are not lawful nor right constituted courts of Christ, and declining all power, authority, and jurisdiction that the said judicatories may claim to themselves over the said Presbytery, or any of the members thereof, or over any that are under their inspection.” After long and serious deliberation, and after solemn prayer to God, this act was unanimously adopted by the Presbytery; and, at the same time, they resolved that when they should be called upon by the Assembly’s officer to appear before that court, they would go in a constituted capacity, with their Moderator at their head; that he should read this declinature in the presence of the Assembly, and if he should be interrupted in the reading of it, he was either to put it into the hands of the Moderator of the Assembly, or leave it on the table, when the whole should retire.

In the Act of Declinature, the Presbytery state, that it is with deep regret that they find themselves obliged in duty to take such a step; that it would have afforded them great

satisfaction if they had not had such weighty grounds and reasons for declining all authority and jurisdiction on the part of the judicatories of the national church; but that they find themselves imperiously called upon, by the peculiar circumstances in which they are placed, publicly to declare that said judicatories are not lawful nor rightly constituted courts of Christ. This declaration they make on the following grounds:—First, these judicatories not only receive into their number, but continue to support intruders, and such as are known to be guilty of such scandalous practices as render them obnoxious to the censures of the church, and who, therefore, have no warrant from the Head of the Church to sit in his courts; Secondly, they have been active in carrying on a course of defection and backsliding from the Lord, by tolerating the erroneous, by supporting and countenancing error, and by enacting laws and constitutions contrary to the laws of the King of Zion, whereby ministerial freedom is suppressed, and new and unwarrantable terms of ministerial and christian communion are imposed, and whereby the heritage of God is oppressed and broken; Thirdly, though the office-bearers of the house of God, in all their spiritual functions and administrations, ought to walk only by the laws and statutes of the Lord Jesus Christ, and though their ecclesiastical courts are held in his name, who is King in Zion, and are subordinate to him alone, yet the present judicatories of the national church have subordinated themselves to the civil powers, in their ecclesiastical functions and administrations, and, therefore, they ought not to be recognised as free and lawful courts of Christ. These grounds of declinature the Presbytery illustrate at considerable length; and they declare, “that any act, sentence, or deed, that may be done, or passed against all, or any one of them, by any of the present judicatories, whereby their ministerial office, or the exercise thereof, or their pastoral office to their respective congregations, may be affected or prejudged, shall be held and reputed as null and void in itself; and that it shall be lawful and warrantable for them, notwithstanding of any such

act, sentence, or deed, to exercise their ministry, in as full and ample a manner as hitherto they have done ; and as if no such act, sentence, or deed had been done or passed against them." And they conclude by stating, " As for this Presbytery, whatever the conduct of the judicatories toward them may be ; and however they may be borne down, reproached, and despised, they are persuaded the cause is the Lord's ; and however weak and unworthy they are whom he has singled out in his adorable providence to put hand to a testimony for him ; and whatever he may see meet to do with them, they desire to rest in faith and hope that the Lord will build up his Jerusalem in Scotland, and gather his dispersed Israel into one."

On the 10th of May, the General Assembly met. After the preliminary business had been gone through, Mr James Ramsay of Kelso, the last Moderator, moved that they should take under their consideration the act of the preceding Assembly, with regard to the ministers who had seceded, and the proceedings of the Commission in reference to said act : It was agreed that this affair, and all the papers connected with it, should be considered in a committee of the whole house. The report of the committee, at next meeting, was, " That they had met, and deliberated upon the case of the Seceding ministers, but had no particular opinion to offer." They were then appointed to meet, on the following day, for farther consideration of the matter. On the 16th, they reported it to be their opinion, " That this General Assembly should proceed upon the libel transmitted from the Commission of the late General Assembly against the Seceding ministers." This report was approved of, and the Assembly resolved to proceed accordingly. From this resolution, Mr John Willison of Dundee dissented, and to his dissent four ministers and two elders adhered ; their reasons of dissent were ordered to lie *in retentis*. On the 17th, the Seceding Brethren, being called by the officer, appeared at the bar of the Assembly in a constituted capacity, with Mr Thomas Mair at their head as Moderator. After the bustle, occasion

ed by their entry had subsided, the Moderator of the Assembly addressed them in soothing language, and said, "That though they were called here to answer to a libel, the Assembly were very loath to be obliged to proceed upon it; and that if the said defenders would now show a disposition to return to the duty and obedience they owe to this church, the Assembly was ready to forgive all that was past, and to receive them with open arms." Mr Mair replied, on behalf of the Presbytery, that they appeared there as a court constituted in the name of Christ; and was about to read the Act of Declinature, when he was interrupted by the Moderator of the Assembly, who caused the libel first to be read, after which Mr Mair was permitted to proceed with the reading of the act. Having finished the reading of it, he delivered it into the hands of the Moderator of the Assembly; and all the brethren having signified their adherence to it, they withdrew from the court to their own place of meeting.

The Assembly, without paying any regard to the Declinature, appointed a committee "to consider the process as it now stands, and to prepare an overture as to the Assembly's farther procedure therein." On the following day, the Seceding ministers were again called, but did not appear. The committee then presented their report, and the draught of an overture which they had prepared, when a long discussion took place. Some were for proceeding to the deposition of the refractory ministers instantly; others were for delay. A division took place upon the question, "Whether they should proceed at present to pass a final sentence or not?" when it carried in the negative. The Assembly next day resumed the consideration of this business; and the committee's overture, after some amendments, was unanimously adopted.

This overture, after commenting in strong terms upon the appearance which the Seceding brethren made at the bar of the Assembly, and upon "the unparalleled boldness" which they had displayed in presuming to decline the authority of

the highest judicatory of the church, found the libel relevant to infer deposition ; found “ the same also proven in its most material articles, by the said paper produced by them as aforesaid.” It then proceeds in the following strain :—

“ But in respect, that in this Assembly, before they proceeded to call said defenders, an inclination had been expressed by several members not to proceed to a final sentence against them at this time, but to forbear the same yet another year, in order to give them a further time to return to their duty, and to render them still more inexcusable if they should persist in their unwarrantable separation ; and though, from their behaviour at their appearance, and the paper given in by them, there is little hope left of their being reclaimed to their duty, but they seem determined to continue in their most unwarrantable and schismatical courses, and so far as in them lies, to ruin and destroy the interests of religion in this church,—this Assembly have thought fit to forbear inflicting the just censure upon them at this time, and to refer the same to the next General Assembly, to which this Assembly do earnestly recommend to inflict the censure of deposition, without further delay, upon such of the said defenders as shall not betwixt and that time, either in presence of the Commission to be named by this Assembly, or of the ensuing General Assembly, retract the said pretended Act and Declinature, and return to their duty and submission to this church. And the Assembly farther recommend to all the members of this Assembly, and particularly such of them as shall be members of the next Assembly, there to urge and insist for their compliance with this recommendation, which this Assembly cannot allow themselves to doubt will be granted, as it will then be absolutely necessary for the interests and credit of this church, that the foresaid censure be pronounced and inflicted against such of the said defenders as shall then be persisting in their separation. And in respect the said defenders have not appeared, though called this diet, the Assembly order their Commission to cause cite them again to appear before the next

Assembly, to abide the judgment thereof, upon the said libel, and the said paper given in by the defenders, instead of an answer, to which Assembly the said libel and process is hereby continued and referred as above ; and as to one of the defenders, Mr James Thomson, minister at Burntisland, who was not contained in the act of the last Assembly, the General Assembly, without determining on the objection offered by his parish in the citation of him, did agree and resolve, that their Commission do cite him, *de novo*, to answer to the next Assembly for the matters contained in the said libel and paper, given in by him and the other defenders. And to the end, the like schismatical and divisive courses, which have so much disturbed the peace and quiet of the church and of the country, and are so very contrary to serious religion and godliness, may be for hereafter effectually discouraged and prevented, the General Assembly ordains all presbyteries and synods strictly to observe the sixth act of the Assembly 1708, intituled, *Act for suppressing schisms and disorders in the church*, by which ‘ it is strictly enjoined, and peremptorily appointed, that all the presbyteries and synods take particular notice of all their members, preachers, or others, under their inspection ; and if they find any ministers or others to fall into irregularities or schismatical courses, that they duly call them to an account, and censure them according to the merits of their fault, even to deposition of ministers and elders, and to apply to the Commission for their advice, as they shall see cause.’ And without derogating from the generality thereof, the Assembly ordains all presbyteries, to whom any minister shall presume to give in a secession or separation from this church, forthwith to give notice thereof to the Moderator of the Commission of the Assembly for the time, and to instruct the members of their presbytery, who shall be members of such Commission, to ask the opinion and direction of that Commission at their first diet, after offering such secessions ; to the end, that if such presbyteries cannot, in the mean time, prevail with the brethren who shall so presume to secede,

to retract their secession, such brethren may be forthwith proceeded against, according to the above act of Assembly; and what opinions and directions of the Commission for the time, as presbyteries shall receive agreeably thereto, these presbyteries are hereby strictly enjoined to follow the same. And in case any presbytery, to whom such secession or separation shall be given in, shall fail in their duty in the premises, the Assembly ordains the synods within whose bounds they may lie, without delay, to do therein as they shall think fit, agreeable to said act of Assembly. And in case such synod shall fail in their duty, the Assembly ordains the Commission to be appointed by this Assembly, to take such matters into their own cognizance; and in all such cases, the presbyteries, synods, or Commission to be appointed by this Assembly respectively, if they cannot quickly reclaim such seceding brethren, are hereby ordained to proceed against them, by way of libel, to the sentence of deposition. And the Assembly appoints, that a short state of the proceedings of the judicatories of this church, with relation to the foresaid ministers, setting forth the gentle methods used for reclaiming them, and their undutiful behaviour to this church, be drawn up by a committee to be named for that effect, and printed, and copies thereof to be transmitted to each presbytery; and that all the ministers of this church shall be careful to exhort the people, both publicly and privately, to guard against divisive courses, and *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*, as they would consult the true interests of serious religion, and the quiet of their country." *

Such was the overture which the Assembly adopted, an overture in which there is a great profession of kindness and of leniency towards the misguided seceders, but which, in reality, breathes a spirit of the keenest hostility. The truth is, that the leaders of this Assembly were anxious to proceed forthwith to the deposition of the Seceding ministers; and their delaying to do so did not proceed from any kindly feel-

* Acts of Assembly, 1739.

ing which they cherished toward the brethren, nor from any particular desire which they had to see them restored to the communion of the church. But they were guided by motives of policy. They did not wish to give offence to that party in the Assembly who were well affected toward the Seceders, and who pled on their behalf for a still farther delay. This Assembly, which professed such a regard for the maintenance of the discipline of the church, and which left on record such a strong recommendation to their successors to depose from the office of the ministry men of acknowledged worth and piety, gave a proof that they were influenced in this business more by personal feeling than by even-handed justice, inasmuch as they passed an act, restoring to the sacred office a person whose principles they declared to be inconsistent with the principles of their church. This person was Mr John Glass of Tealing, against whom the Commission of 1730 had pronounced a sentence of deposition, on account of his having adopted Independent principles. The conduct which he had pursued since that time, had been at least equally sectarian with that of the Seceders; the principles which he still continued to hold, were more at variance with those of the Church of Scotland, than were the principles of the Seceding brethren; and, notwithstanding all this, him they restored, in the plenitude of their power, to the "character of a minister of the gospel of Christ," while the brethren were denounced as altogether unworthy of the sacred office. It may be proper, however, to add, that though the Assembly re-invested Mr Glass with the character of a minister, of which they had formerly deprived him, they at the same time declared him incapable of being called or settled in any congregation in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland, until he should renounce his peculiar principles.

The process against the Seceding ministers was brought to a final termination by the Assembly which met in May 1740. The brethren being thrice publicly called at the doors of the Assembly-house, and none of them appearing,

nor any person for them, the libel was again read over *pro forma* on the 12th, and on the 15th, sentence of deposition was pronounced against them in the following terms:—
“ The General Assembly, pursuant to their resolution of the 12th instant, resumed the consideration of the process against the eight Seceding ministers, and having caused them to be again called, and none of them compearing, nor any person for them, the Assembly caused to be read the minute of their proceeding in this affair on Monday last, and also that of the last Assembly of May 19, 1739, and then proceeded to consider, whether, upon the libel found relevant to infer deposition, and proven as to its most material articles by the last General Assembly, against the whole ministers therein named, and again found relevant and proven by this Assembly, in so far as concerns Mr James Thomson, upon the new libel executed against him, in pursuance of the said act of the last Assembly, this Assembly should proceed to inflict the said sentence of deposition ; and after full reasoning upon the expediency thereof, and prayer to God for direction how to judge in this weighty affair, and for his blessing on such decision as the Assembly should come to, it was agreed to put the question, *Depose or Not?* And rolls being called, and votes marked, it carried by a very great majority, *Depose*. And, therefore, the General Assembly, in respect of the articles found relevant and proven against the persons therein and hereafter named by the last and this Assembly, as aforesaid, DID, and hereby DO, in the name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, the sole king and head of the church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by Him to them, actually DEPOSE Messrs Ebenezer Erskine at Stirling, William Wilson at Perth, Alexander Moncrieff at Abernethy, James Fisher at Kinclaven, Ralph Erskine at Dunfermline, Thomas Mair at Orwell, Thomas Nairn at Abbots-hall, and James Thomson at Burntisland, ministers, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging them, and every one of them, to exercise the same, or any part thereof, within this church in all time coming, and the

Assembly DID, and hereby DO DECLARE all the parishes or charges of the persons above named, vacant, from and after the day and date of this sentence, and ordains copies hereof to be sent to the several presbyteries of Stirling, Perth, Dunkeld, Dunfermline, and Kirkaldy ; and the said respective presbyteries are hereby ordered to send copies hereof, to the kirk sessions of Perth and Dunfermline, and session clerks of the other respective parishes hereby declared vacant, to be communicated to the elders. And the Assembly appoints that letters be wrote by their Moderator to the magistrates of the respective burghs concerned, with copies of this sentence ; and the Assembly recommends to the presbyteries within whose bounds the parishes or charges declared vacant do lie, to be careful in using their best endeavours for supplying the same during the vacancy, and for promoting the speedy and comfortable settlement thereof.*

Fifteen ministers and four ruling elders dissented from this sentence ; and, at a subsequent meeting, the Assembly empowered their Commission to decide in any process that might come before them from any presbytery or synod, with a view to the speedy settlement of the parishes thus declared vacant.

It will be difficult to find in the records of any ecclesiastical court a sentence more unjust and tyrannical, than that which the Assembly at this time pronounced against the Fathers of the Secession. The reader will naturally ask, for what was it, that these good men were deposed from the office of the holy ministry ? Was it because they were chargeable with error in doctrine ? Was it because they were immoral in practice ? Was it because they held principles at variance with the constitution of the Church of Scotland ? No : They were eminently distinguished for their soundness in the faith, for the purity of their lives, and for their warm attachment to the constitution of that church from which they were expelled. In these respects, even their worst enemies could not affix the slightest stain upon their character. The people revered them for their piety, and by not a

* Acts of Assembly 1740.

few of their brethren in the ministry were they held in high esteem, as good and conscientious men. Why, then, were they subjected to the highest ecclesiastical censure that can be inflicted on a minister of the gospel? The simple answer to this question is, that they were deposed because they had formed themselves into a presbytery, for the purpose of giving to their countrymen a pure dispensation of gospel ordinances, unfettered by the laws of patronage, and other acts of parliament. They were deposed because they refused any longer to co-operate with the established judicatories, in carrying on that system of ecclesiastical tyranny, which had been pursued by them for such a number of years. They had complained, petitioned, and remonstrated; but all to no purpose. Their remonstrances, as well as the complaints of the people, were disregarded, and the only course left them to pursue, consistently with a good conscience, was to withdraw from the communion of a church, which, if it did not openly tolerate, at least winked at error, and which, by the decisions of its courts, had sanctioned, for a series of years, the most oppressive measures. And because they would not return to the communion of this church when invited, but preferred acting by themselves, as a separate presbytery, they were forsooth deposed, as being no longer worthy of the office of the ministry! That this was the head and front of their offending is obvious from the language which the Moderator addressed to them, when they appeared at the bar of the Assembly in 1739; they were then told, that if they “would return to the obedience which they owed to the church;” in other words, if they would cease to make any farther opposition to the course of mal-administration which the church was pursuing, all their past conduct would be forgotten, the libel would be thrown aside, and they “would be received with open arms.” To allow them time to consider whether they would refuse or accept of this kind invitation, a year of respite was granted them. The Seceders, preferring to make a sacrifice of their worldly interests, rather than a compromise of duty, continued firm

to their purpose ; and the year of grace having expired, they were, in 1740, deposed accordingly. * What an idea are we to form, from this transaction, of the morality and justice of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland at that period. The sentence of deposition which, in the frenzy of party spirit, they pronounced against the founders of the Secession, men of acknowledged worth and piety, and the grounds upon which this sentence was pronounced by them, will stand to future generations as a blot upon their annals, which no sophistry will ever be able to wipe out.

Whether the Seceding ministers might have kept possession both of their churches and their stipends, notwithstanding the sentence of deposition pronounced against them by the Assembly, is a question which some have been inclined to answer in the affirmative ; and this opinion they rest upon an act, passed in the reign of Queen Anne, which prohibits magistrates from giving effect to any sentence pronounced by an ecclesiastical court.* Whether this be a just interpretation of the act referred to or not, I shall not take upon me to determine. At all events, the Seceding ministers showed no disposition to have the validity of this opinion ascertained by an appeal to the courts of law. They knew that they were secure in the possession of their flocks. From the hearts and affections of their devoted people no sentence of deposition could drive them ; and while they felt themselves securely entrenched in these strongholds, they renounced, without a struggle, the places of worship and the stipends which the law had provided for them. It is but justice, however, to the civil authorities connected with the districts to which the deposed ministers belonged, to state, that with two exceptions, no immediate attempt was made to exclude them by force from their usual places of worship. Mr Ralph Erskine at Dunfermline, and Mr Thomson at Burntisland, continued to occupy their pulpits for at least two years after sentence of deposition was pronounced against them. The conduct of the magistrates in permitting them to do so, was

* Struther's History of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 2.

made a subject of complaint to the Assembly which met in 1742; and the moderator was appointed to write to the magistrates of these burghs, “exhorting them to give no longer countenance to such disorders, but to perform their duty, by debarring the deposed persons from access to officiate in the parish churches.”* No attempt was made to exclude by violence Mr Moncrieff of Abernethy from his church; but, with a becoming dignity of character, he refused to enter it, and preferred preaching, even during winter, in the open air. Mr Nairn of Abbotshall was permitted quietly to occupy his church till the month of October, when the heritors, of their own accord, locked the doors of the church, and of the churchyard, and nailed plates of iron upon the key-holes, to prevent either minister or people from getting access.†

If we may judge from what took place, the strongest ebullition of party feeling, on the part of the magistrates toward the Seceding brethren, was manifested at Stirling and Perth. At both of these towns, the venerable men of God, along with their congregations, were forcibly excluded from their usual places of worship the very first Sabbath after sentence of deposition had been pronounced by the Assembly. At Stirling, the magistrates prohibited the ringing of the church bells to convene the people to worship; and Mr Erskine, having gone up at the usual hour, found the church doors locked, and the congregation assembled around the sanctuary. Some proposed, in the heat of their indignation, that a forcible entry should be made, by breaking open the doors. This, however, Mr Erskine would not permit; but lifting up the pulpit Bible, which it was customary for him to carry to church, he protested, in a solemn manner, that he was pursuing the path of duty, and that not he, but his opposers were answerable for the events of that day. He then withdrew, attended by his congregation, to a convenient place in the neighbourhood, where the services of the day were con-

* Unprinted Acts of Assembly, 1742.

† Continuation of Wilson's Defence, p. 91.

ducted in the open air. The spot selected for this purpose, was a green eminence on the north side of the town, immediately beneath the frowning battlements of the castle, commanding a view of the Grampians in the distance, and looking down upon the smiling plains of the Forth. Imagination can scarcely conceive a finer scene than a congregation of worshippers assembled on such an occasion, and in such a spot. Mr Erskine commenced the services of the day by giving out the first portion of the sixtieth psalm. The verses selected by him were peculiarly appropriate to the circumstances in which the congregation were placed :—

“ O Lord, thou hast rejected us,
And scatter'd us abroad ;
Thou justly hast displeased been ;
Return to us, O God.
The earth to tremble thou hast made ;
Therein didst breaches make :
Do thou thereof the breaches heal,
Because the land doth shake,” &c. &c.

After a solemn prayer offered up to God, he read out for his text, Matt. viii. 27, “ But the men marvelled, saying, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him.” Many have been heard to speak of the occurrences of that day with mingled emotions of vexation and delight,—vexation at the unjust treatment which their minister received, in being driven from his church ; and delight at the recollection of the solemn truths which, on that occasion, were uttered by him with more than his ordinary earnestness.

The sentence of deposition was carried into effect against Mr Wilson at Perth, in a manner equally summary and rigorous. On the Sabbath morning, the magistrates received the moderator's letter, informing them of the sentence which the Assembly had pronounced ; and they took immediate measures for giving it effect. When Mr Wilson, accompanied by a friend, went to the house of God at the usual hour, he found an immense concourse of people as-

sembled in the streets, and the magistrates, with their guards, drawn up in front of the building, prepared to oppose his entrance. The following account, given by his biographer, of what took place at this memorable crisis, is so graphically sketched, and so interesting in itself, that I consider no apology necessary for extracting it at full length. It will give my readers a vivid idea of the spirit which animated the Fathers of the Secession :—

“ Mr Wilson, undaunted, advanced to the main entrance, and addressing those authorities who guarded it, demanded admission by an authority higher than theirs. ‘ In the name of my Divine Master,’ said the venerable pastor, ‘ I demand admission into his temple.’ The demand was thrice made in the same manner, and thrice met with a determined and stern refusal. On this there was a simultaneous stir in the crowd ; and those who had seen or heard the repeated demands and refusals of entrance, became indignant and impatient, and were about to stone the civil authorities of the city, and to force an entrance for the ministers they loved. But, perceiving their designs, Mr Wilson, with affectionate and commanding dignity, turned to the crowd, and firmly forbade the execution of their purpose. ‘ No violence,’ said he, ‘ my friends ; the Master whom I serve is the *Prince of Peace*.’

“ Mr Ferrier,* in the mean time, having endeavoured in vain to procure admission for his minister, solemnly protested against the conduct of the magistrates ; and, on remarking that they could justify themselves neither before God nor men for their proceedings that day, was told, in reply, ‘ they would take men in their own hands, and would answer to God when they were called.’

“ At this interesting juncture, the deacon of the glovers’ corporation stepped forward, and said to Mr Wilson, that if he would accept of the glovers’ yard for the services of the

* Mr Ferrier was the friend who accompanied Mr Wilson on this occasion. He was a writer in Perth, and a gentleman of high respectability.

day, he was most welcome to it. The kind and seasonable offer was most readily and thankfully accepted. Thither he immediately retired, followed by an immense concourse of people. An erection was soon obtained, where he might conveniently conduct the public worship of God.

“ In the mean time, ‘ Mr John Hally, then a probationer, employed by Mr David Black to preach that day, being attended by the said Mr Black, was, with the assistance of the magistrates, thrust into the pulpit.’

“ During these procedures, Mr Wilson was quite composed. The trying scene had not unfitted him for the discharge of those duties in which he delighted ; and his sphere of usefulness was, by these events, much extended. Many more than the church could have contained, flocked to hear him. A considerable proportion of these were doubtless prompted by curiosity alone ; but by far the greater number were deeply interested in the occurrences of the times, and were determined to adhere to their godly minister.

“ There was something highly appropriate, and peculiarly expressive of the feelings of this excellent Father of the Secession, in the psalm with which he commenced, in the open air, the public solemnities of the Sabbath :—

“ He was no foe that me reproached,
Then that endure I could ;
Nor hater that did 'gainst me boast,
From him me hide I would.
But thou, man, who mine equal, guide,
And mine acquaintance wast :
We join'd sweet counsels, to God's house
In company we pass'd.”—Ps. lv. 12-14.

“ The prayer, we doubt not, accorded with the peculiar circumstances in which he and his fellow-worshippers were placed, breathing the devout feelings of his heart, showing how resigned he was to the disposing will of the God of providence, and how anxious he was that the events of the day in particular, and of the times in general, might be ren-

dered subservient to the divine glory, and to the prosperity of the church.

“ When he opened the sacred volume, the text he read produced a thrill in every heart, and especially among the more thoughtful part of the audience : ‘ *Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him, without the camp, bearing his reproach.*’

“ The devotional exercises of this eventful Sabbath were, throughout, solemn and interesting, and much calculated to make a deep and lasting impression on those who witnessed them. When the work of the day was over, Mr Wilson, on returning home, went directly to his study, tired and worn out with his anxieties and exertions. Isabella, his eldest daughter, then but twelve years of age, but who, attended by one of the servants, had witnessed the whole extraordinary scene,—a scene which she distinctly remembered as long as she lived, and often mentioned to her family with the deepest interest, felt very curious to understand from her father the meaning of what had taken place, but not liking to ask him, she hung about the door of his apartment till he observed her, and perceived what were her feelings and wishes. He then called her, and said, ‘ Bell, this has been a day of trial, but we have reason to be thankful that it has not been a day of shame. If any one ask you, Bell, why your father lost his kirk, you may just say, as good Mr Guthrie, before his death, directed my mother to say of him, if she was asked why he lost his head,—that it was in a good cause.’ ” *

* Ferrier's Memoirs of the Rev. W. Wilson. p. 339-343.

CHAPTER IV.

The breach between the Secession and the Establishment rendered irreparable. Riotous opposition made to the Secession. Seceding tenants persecuted by their landlords. Pamphlets written against the Secession. Mr Wilson of Perth writes a "Defence." Anecdote. Mr Gavin Beugo and Mr James Mair, probationers, join the Associate Presbytery. Paper of accession by Mr Beugo. Ordination of Mr John Hunter. His death. Anecdote of Principal Robertson. Reply of a Seceder to a member of the Establishment. Licentiates of the Presbytery. Recommendation by the Presbytery to their adherents. Act passed by the Presbytery concerning public fasts. Difference of opinion among the members on this subject. Appearance of Mr George Whitefield. His great labours. His popularity. Invited by the Seceders to come to Scotland. Their object in giving the invitation. Correspondence between Mr Whitefield and the Messrs Erskine. Mr Whitefield arrives at Leith. Preaches in Mr R. Erskine's pulpit in Dunfermline. His conference with the Associate Presbytery. Unsatisfactory issue of the conference. Remarks upon the conference. Unhappy results. Death of the Rev. Mr Wilson. His character. Mr Moncrieff appointed Professor of Divinity. Mr Whitefield's second visit to Scotland. Extraordinary work at Cambuslang. Controversy concerning it. A fast appointed on account of it, by the Associate Presbytery. The Presbytery's conduct condemned. Opinion concerning the "Cambuslang work."

THE pronouncing of the sentence of deposition against the eight brethren, made the separation betwixt the Secession and the Establishment final. The breach was now so completely widened by the strong measures that had been adopted, that, from that period, it may be considered as irreparable. That the cause of the Seceders was decidedly popular,

amongst a large class of the community, is sufficiently apparent from the number of petitions that were poured in upon the Associate Presbytery's table, from all parts of the country. So numerous and so urgent were the demands made upon them for sermon, that, without being constantly from home, they could not answer one-half of the applications that were made to them.

At that period, the principles of religious freedom were not so well understood as they are at present, and the most mean and unbecoming attempts were made to check the progress of the Secession. Those in the higher ranks professed to regard the Seceders as turbulent, disaffected persons; while the vulgar, catching the infection from their superiors, entertained the most illiberal prejudices against all those who joined the standard of the Secession. In various districts of the country, this spirit of hostility displayed itself in petty acts of aggression. Mr Ebenezer Erskine having engaged to preach at Blairlogie, in the neighbourhood of Stirling, a tent was erected for him by his friends in that quarter; but, on the morning of the day on which the religious services were to take place, the tent was broken to fragments by some ill-disposed persons. Mr Erskine, however, was not to be thus deterred from doing his Master's work. At his suggestion, the people prepared for him a temporary erection; and, having covered it with their tartan plaids, to shelter the preacher from the weather, Mr Erskine, after a solemn address to the inhabitants of the district, concerning the wickedness that had been done amongst them, conducted the exercises of the day as if nothing unusual had taken place. A large congregation having assembled at Braidscraig, in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, where Messrs R. Erskine and William Wilson were engaged in conducting the services of a fast, repeated attempts were made, during the time of worship, to throw the people into a state of alarm, and to drive them from the ground which they occupied. Some mischievous persons, by shooting at game in the immediate vicinity of the spot where the people

were assembled, and by setting fire to the furze and shrubs, with which the ground was covered, endeavoured to disperse the congregation. The tent in which the ministers were officiating, had to be guarded by a band of men, to prevent it from being overturned. “ At St Andrews, such of the inhabitants as had connected themselves with the congregation of Abernethy, were regularly, on their way home from public worship, attacked by a mob, and pelted with stones, or otherwise abused. One of them was accustomed to say, ‘ Could our neighbours be convinced that they confer an honour in thus accounting us worthy to suffer injury for the sake of the gospel, they would soon desist from their present practices.’ ” *

In certain instances, landlords threatened to turn their tenants out of their farms, if they permitted the Seceders to assemble, for worship, on their ground, or gave them any countenance. The Earl of Belhaven, in East Lothian, having threatened to deprive a respectable tenant of his lease, because he chose to attend a Secession place of worship, received from him the following dignified reply :—“ My Lord, my grandfather, father, and myself have all been comfortable as tenants on your Lordship’s estate ; but we never surrendered our consciences to you ; and, if your Lordship is resolved to be the first persecutor in East Lothian, for conscience’ sake, I am determined to be the first in submitting to persecution.”

The press also teemed with angry pamphlets against the Secession. Messrs John Currie of Kinglassie, and John Williamson of Inveresk, took the lead in this species of warfare ; and, by their mode of conducting it, acquired to themselves an inglorious notoriety. Though there is reason to believe that both of them were good men, yet, in carrying on this controversy, they displayed a bitterness of spirit that was unbecoming their character as ministers of the gospel of peace. They admitted that there were corruptions in the Church of Scotland, but denied that these corruptions were such as to render a separation from her necessary. The sum

* Christian Repository, vol. iv. p. 8.

and substance of the charges which they reiterated, in a variety of forms, against the Seceders was, that in withdrawing from the communion of a true church, such as the Church of Scotland was acknowledged to be, they acted in opposition to the authority of Scripture, to the confessions of all the reformed churches, to the constitution and standards of their own church, and to the practice of many eminent men of former times, who, while they admitted and deplored the corruptions and defections that prevailed in the national church, still continued in her communion.

To these charges the Seceders replied, that while they readily admitted, that separation from a church was not to be lightly or hastily made, even though corruptions did prevail in it, yet when a church, in her judicative capacity, carries on a course of defection, in an obstinate way, and suppresses all attempts at testifying against her defections, by preaching, by petitions, and protestations, then it is the duty of all who wish to maintain the purity of the faith and the interests of religion, to withdraw from her communion. They farther maintained, that they did not pretend to be a distinct church from the Church of Scotland, but to be a separate party in that church, who had withdrawn from the corrupt majority, until they should effect a reformation of the abuses and corruptions that prevailed. The reasoning of their opponents against them, they alleged, if it proved any thing, in reference to the question at issue between them, proved too much; for the same arguments might be employed to show that separation from the Church of Rome, or from any other church, however corrupt, was sinful and unwarrantable. The person who stood forward as the chief defender of the Secession against the attacks that were made upon it through the medium of the press, was the Rev. Mr Wilson of Perth. His "Defence," and the "Continuation" of it, in reply to Mr Currie, have long been justly admired as excellent specimens of controversial reasoning.

Many of the good ministers of the Church of Scotland regretted the separation that had taken place, and continued

to cherish toward the Seceding brethren sentiments of sincere respect. A worthy minister from the country, meeting accidentally with Mr Ralph Erskine, in one of the narrow thoroughfares of Edinburgh, soon after sentence of deposition had been pronounced by the Assembly, was so overcome by recollections of their former friendship, that he burst into tears and exclaimed, "O! Mr Erskine, I am *wae* * that they have cast you out." He then fell upon his neck, and kissed him. Mr Erskine, after receiving his salutation, smilingly replied, "I wonder, Mr G. that you can venture to kiss a deposed minister."

The deposition of the Seceding ministers by the Assembly, had no influence in checking the progress of the Secession. New accessions were made to them from all quarters. The cry amongst the people was both loud and general for preachers to be sent to them by the Presbytery; and it was so far fortunate, with a view to the answering of these demands, that the hands of the Presbytery were at this time strengthened by some of the probationers of the Established Church placing themselves under their superintendence. Two of these probationers, Mr Gavin Beugo, and Mr James Mair, gave in their adherence to the Presbytery, at a meeting held in Stirling, in the month of July 1739. As the paper of accession laid on the Presbytery's table, by Mr Beugo, contains in it a brief statement of the grounds of the Secession, and may be regarded as a specimen of the general tenor in which similar applications were made to the Presbytery, I shall here quote it at full length:—

"Unto the Reverend the moderator and remanent members of the Associate Presbytery, met at Stirling, the 17th day of July 1739 years,

"Having considered that this national church, as represented in her judicatories, has in several instances made defection from our reformation principles, particularly in the matter of the settlement of gospel ministers, by intruding ministers into parishes, in opposition to the declared inclina-

* Sorry.

tion of the Christian people, whereby they are deprived of that right which is allowed them by the word of God, and the laudable constitutions and acts of the Church of Scotland, to the oppressing, scattering, and dividing of the flock of Christ; and further considering that several very dangerous errors, destructive of Christianity, have been brought to the bar of church judicatories, and have either been passed without any censure at all, or with a censure very disproportional to the demerit of the fault, which is contrary to the character of the church of the living God, mentioned by the apostle Paul, 1 Timothy iii. 15, where it is called the pillar and ground of truth, signifying to us that it ought to be the business of the church to hold forth and confess the truth publicly and openly, and to maintain and defend the same against the attempts of adversaries to overturn the same; as also, that the greatest part of the ministers of the Established Church have submitted to an erastian encroachment upon the headship of Christ, by reading an act of parliament lately emitted concerning Captain Porteous, contrary to Galatians i. 10, where the apostle says, ‘If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ;’ and that the rest of the ministers have joined in church judicatories with them, without signifying their displeasure thereanent. Upon these and other accounts, more fully set forth in a Judicial Act and Testimony emitted by the Associate Presbytery, I cannot with freedom submit myself to these judicatories thus carrying on a course of defection. On the other hand, having considered that several brethren in the ministry have made a Secession from the judicatories of the Established Church, and have constituted themselves into a Presbytery in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great and glorious head of the church, and in that capacity have lifted up a testimony for the truth against the abounding errors and backslidings of the day, and having seen and considered several papers set forth by them, and particularly a paper entitled, *A Judicial Act and Testimony*, formerly mentioned, I cannot but in my judgment approve of the same as a suitable and a seasonable testimony

for the truth, and against several errors and corruptions of the day, and I resolve, through the Lord's assistance, to do what is incumbent upon me in my station to promote the design of the same; And I hereby declare my accession to the said Presbytery, and promise due subjection to them in the Lord, and this I reckon myself obliged to do by virtue of the engagements I came under, when I was licensed to preach the gospel, at which time I was bound to maintain the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church of Scotland founded on the word of God, and her standards agreeable thereunto. May Zion's King give success to the labours of the Associate Presbytery in the Lord's work among their hands.

“Subscribed by me day and date above,

“GA. BEUGO.”

Mr John Hunter, the first licentiate of the Secession Church, having received a call from the united congregations of Morebattle and Stitchell, the Presbytery met at Gateshaw on the 17th of October 1739, for the purpose of ordaining him. This being the first ordination at which the brethren had been called upon to assist, since their separation from the national church, the occasion was regarded as peculiarly solemn. The day was appointed to be observed as a day of fasting; and the public services commenced by Mr Thomson offering up supplication for the divine presence and blessing. Mr Ralph Erskine preached from Luke xiv. 23, “Compel them to come in that my house may be filled.” The formula of questions, previously prepared by the Presbytery, was then proposed to Mr Hunter, and satisfactory answers being returned, he was solemnly set apart to the office of the holy ministry by prayer and imposition of hands. The ministerial career of this promising young man was but of short duration. It pleased the all-wise disposer of events to remove him from the scene of his earthly labours in the month of January in the following year, scarcely three months after he was ordained. His early death was lamented both by his

congregation and by the Presbytery. His talents and popularity were such as to give promise of great usefulness in the church.

The following anecdote of the late Principal Robertson, shows that Mr Hunter's talents for producing an impression upon his auditors were of a superior order :—During the first years of the Secession, it was customary for fasts to be held in the different districts of the country, by appointment of the Presbytery. On these occasions, one or two ministers preached to large assemblages of people who were collected from the surrounding neighbourhood. One of these fasts being held in the vicinity of Gladsmuir, for the benefit of the East Lothian Seceders, the Principal, who was then a boy, and on a visit to his grandfather, the parish minister of Gladsmuir, attended along with the rest of the people. Mr Hunter was the person who officiated. Young Robertson's attention was quite arrested by the earnestness and seriousness of the preacher, and by the solemn and impressive manner in which he made an offer of Christ to the audience. Many years afterwards, when the Principal had raised himself, by his talents, to the highest eminence, both as a leader in the church, and as a member of the republic of letters, in a conversation which he had with one of the ministers of the Secession, he stated to him the circumstance of his having heard, in early life, Mr Hunter preach, and the strong impression which had been produced upon him by Mr Hunter's pointed appeals; and added, "Even yet, when I retire to my studies, the recollection of what I then heard thrills through my mind."

The untimely death of Mr Hunter gave occasion to a member of the Church of Scotland to remark to a Seceder, that God was apparently frowning on their cause, when he had removed, at such an early period, their first licentiate, a man of such eminent talents :—"No," replied the other, "it is not a frown. You know, that God under the Jewish dispensation claimed the first fruits, which secured a good harvest; and I expect that there will be raised up in the Seces-

sion Church a good harvest of gospel ministers." This remark, uttered at a venture, about a century ago, has been abundantly verified.

Though the number of members belonging to the Presbytery was now increased, and though they had several licentiates under their inspection,* who were constantly employed in preaching to the vacant congregations, yet they still found themselves unable to answer the numerous applications that were made to them from the different districts of the country. At a meeting held at Dunfermline in the month of August, 1740, there were petitions laid upon their table from no fewer than nine congregations, all of them requesting that moderations might be appointed to take place amongst them, with a view to their obtaining a settled ministry. At this meeting a recommendation was issued to all who were under their inspection, to form themselves into societies for prayer and religious conference; and the members of these societies were earnestly exhorted to avoid questions that might tend to strife rather than to edifying. They were enjoined to give themselves to the diligent perusal of the Scriptures; to make themselves well acquainted with the Confession of Faith, and with the other subordinate standards of the church; and they were to compare the statements therein contained with the texts of Scripture adduced in support of them, so that their faith in these matters might not rest upon human but upon a divine testimony. It was further recommended to them, that they should study the principles of the Reformation, and interest themselves in the public cause of Christ; and heads of families were exhorted diligently to instruct their children and their servants in these things.

A question, relating to the appointment of public fasts, occupied at this time the attention of the Presbytery, and

* The following are the names of the probationers, who at this period were under the superintendence of the Presbytery:—Messrs Adam Gib, Andrew Clarkson, William Hutton, David Smyton, James Mair, Gavin Beugo, and William Young.

produced among the members thereof a collision of sentiment. The king, having in compliance with a petition from the Commission of the Assembly, appointed a general fast to be observed on the first day of February, 1740, the Associate Presbytery agreed that the same day should be set apart by the Secession congregations to a similar exercise. They considered that the circumstances, in which the nation was placed, were such as loudly called for fasting and humiliation; and while they refused to acknowledge the right of the king to appoint fasts, regarding this as an invasion of the prerogative of Jesus Christ, as Head of the church, yet they did not think the day which had been appointed less suitable on that account: and justly conceiving that the people under their inspection would be able to engage in this solemn exercise, on such a day, with less inconvenience to themselves, they therefore appointed it to be observed as a day of fasting, for reasons of their own which they specified.

This appointment gave offence to some of the people; and at next meeting a representation was sent up from certain societies in Ross-shire and Teviotdale, complaining that the Presbytery had so far *homologated* the invasion of the headship of Christ as to appoint a fast to be observed on a day, which had previously been appointed by the king. The Presbytery received the remonstrance in good part, and promised to take the subject into serious consideration, so as to prevent all ground of complaint for the future. It was not, however, till nearly a year had elapsed, when upon an application from the Commission, another day of fasting was appointed by the king, that the consideration of this subject was resumed. Messrs Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, Mr Moncrieff, and Mr Thomas Mair were appointed a committee to prepare an act relative to this matter, and to submit it to the Presbytery at a future meeting. The sentiments of the committee being divided upon this subject, it was not without considerable struggling that the draught of an act was prepared. This draught being submitted to the consideration of the Presbytery at their next meeting, it was, after

some discussion, adopted by a majority of one; four of the members having voted *for*, and three *against* it. The majority consisted of Mr Nairn, Mr Moncrieff, Mr Thomas Mair, and Mr William Hutton (who was now a member of Presbytery); and the minority consisted of Messrs Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, and Mr James Wardlaw, ruling elder from Dunfermline. The minority felt keenly on the subject, and Mr Ebenezer Erskine was prevented from entering his dissent solely by prudential considerations. He easily perceived how discouraging it would be to their friends, and what a triumph it would afford to their enemies, should they behold the members of Presbytery at variance among themselves, after having been deposed only a few months previously by the Assembly.*

In this act, which was passed at Dunfermline on the 9th day of January, 1741, the Presbytery condemned the conduct of the Commission, in petitioning the king to appoint a fast, which they pronounced to be a voluntary giving up of the intrinsic power of the church; they also bore testimony against the usurpation, on the part of the civil magistrate, of the headship of Jesus Christ; and they farther expressed their sorrow at their own conduct, in appearing to countenance such usurpation, when, in the preceding year, they appointed a fast to be observed on the day which had previously been set apart for this purpose by the authority of the state. After enumerating and bewailing the sins that abounded in the land, on account of which they were called upon to humble themselves in the sight of God, they express their sentiments, on the subject referred to, in the following terms:—

“Whereas,” say they, “the Commission of the last pretended Assembly have given up to the civil magistrate the power belonging to the church of Christ to appoint days of fasting and humiliation, and to name the day; and that we are informed from the public prints, that the civil magistrate hath assumed that power, unlawfully resigned to him by the Established Church, by appointing a fast, in consequence of

* Brown's MS.

the Commission's application, to be observed in Scotland the fourth of February next; and though the Presbytery observed a fast last year on the same day appointed for that end by the magistrate, after declaring they could not observe the said day upon his authority, in the proclamation for that effect, but for the reasons mentioned in the act, for appointing the same day; yet however plausible these reasons at that time appeared unto us, we cannot now but apprehend, upon more mature consideration, and desire, in the first place, as the Lord shall assist, to own and acknowledge, that upon a mistake, we ourselves went too far in symbolising with the above unwarrantable practice of the church's giving up, and the magistrates assuming, the power of naming the day, by observing the same day appointed by the civil magistrate; and we desire through grace to lie low in the dust before the Lord, saying, What we see not, teach thou us, and if we have done iniquity, we will do so no more. And though it was controverted, last year, that the intrinsic power of the church was both given up and assumed, in regard there were so few days between the meeting of the Commission and the date of the proclamation, yet now that the Commission have repeated their deed of a formal and voluntary giving up to the civil magistrate the intrinsic power of the church, by applying to the king for naming the day for fasting and humiliation, and that he hath appointed the day accordingly; it appears evident, that there is a sinful combination between church and state to make an invasion upon the headship and sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ over his church as his free and independent kingdom; and we cannot but look upon it as a cause of humiliation before the Lord, that such manifest dishonour hath been done unto him whom God hath appointed King in his holy hill of Zion. The Lord our God, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God. He is jealous of his worship and honour, and will not give his glory to another. And though it is the duty of all ranks to humble themselves before the Lord, and for each to stir up one another to this exercise; and particularly for the civil magis-

trate to excite those under him to this duty ; yet as it is the duty of the office-bearers in the Lord's house to search out and discover the causes of the Lord's contending with a church and land, and to set apart times of solemn humiliation before the Lord on account of these, and even to say to kings and to queens, humble yourselves ; so when a church does deliver up to the powers of the earth that trust and right which the Lord hath lodged in their hand, and when the civil magistrate adventures either to deprive the church of her right, or accept of and exercise that trust which she hath sinfully alienated, it is consenting to the alienation, and so incurring the guilt in conjunction with the church, of dethroning the Prince of the kings of the earth, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords."

This act gave offence to many even of the best friends of the Secession ; they could not see either the reasonableness or propriety of it. Mr Currie exclaimed against it, as an unwarrantable stretch of authority on the part of the Presbytery ; and no person attempted to reply to him. The question, Whether it be lawful and right to appoint a fast to be observed on a day, which the civil magistrate has previously set apart for this purpose, is not one of much practical importance. It is difficult to perceive the force of the objection, which was urged against the adopting of such a day, viz. that it was a homologating of the invasion of the prerogative of Jesus Christ as Head of the church. It would probably have been as well, if the Presbytery had given no deliverance upon the subject, but left their congregations to act, in this matter, according to their own particular views. At all events, the question was assuredly not of such importance, as that the determining of it, whether in the affirmative or the negative, ought to have excited any feeling of bitterness either amongst the ministers or people.

The uncommon popularity of the Rev. George Whitefield, and the great success of his labours, drew toward him, at this time, the attention of the religious world. Educated in the Church of England, he had connected himself, while

attending the University of Oxford, with the newly formed Society of Methodists, of which the two Wesleys, Hervey, and a few other pious young men, were the founders. Having received episcopal ordination from Benson, Bishop of Gloucester, at the early age of twenty-one, he visited Georgia twice, in the course of a few years, where he acquired for himself no small reputation by his indefatigable labours, and by the fervour and eloquence of his preaching. Admiring crowds attended his ministry, wherever he appeared ; and there can be little doubt, that during his stay in America, he was the honoured instrument of producing serious impressions upon the hearts of not a few. One of his transatlantic brethren bearing testimony to the great success which attended his labours in that quarter, says ;—“ He appears to be full of the love of God, and fired with an extraordinary zeal for the cause of Christ, and applies himself with the most indefatigable diligence that ever was seen amongst us, for promoting the good of souls. His head, his heart, his hands, seem to be full of his Master’s business. His discourses, especially when he goes into the expository way, are very entertaining ; every eye is fixed upon him, and every ear chained to his lips ; most are very much affected ; many awakened and convinced ; and a general seriousness excited. His address, more especially to the passions, is wonderful, and beyond what I have ever seen. I think I can truly say, that his preaching has quickened me, and I believe it has many others besides, as well as the people. Several of my flock, especially the younger sort, have been brought under convictions by his preaching ; and there is this remarkable amongst them, of the good effect of his preaching, that the word preached now by us, seems more precious to them, and comes with more power upon them. My prayer for him is, that his precious life may be lengthened out, and that he may be an instrument of reviving dying religion in all places whithersoever he comes, who seems to be wonderfully fitted for, as well as spirited to, it.”*

* Gillies’ Life of Whitefield, p. 68.

When he returned to England, in the beginning of the year 1741, for the purpose of procuring collections for the Orphan-house which he had founded in Georgia, his labours were no less abundant and no less successful than they had been in America. Scarcely a day passed in which he did not preach several discourses, mostly in the open air. In many of the districts, which he visited, awakenings were produced; and such was the effect of his eloquence, that when he preached for charitable objects, hundreds of pounds were frequently collected at a single discourse.

The favourable accounts circulated concerning this distinguished preacher had induced the Messrs Erskine to enter into an epistolary correspondence with him. He and they appear, at first, to have entertained for one another sentiments of mutual esteem. The honourable stand, which these men, in connexion with the other Seceding brethren, had made for the purity of the faith, and for the christian liberties of the people; the harsh treatment which they had received from the prevailing party in the Established Church; and the signal success which had attended their labours in the ministry, drew toward them his favourable regards. They, on the other hand, were favourably impressed toward him, on account of the zeal, energy, and boldness which he displayed in preaching the gospel to his fellow-men; and they, in all probability, conceived that between him and them there was a considerable similarity, as to the relative position in which they stood toward their respective churches. Influenced by such considerations as these, the Seceders were desirous that Mr Whitefield should pay a visit to Scotland; and his correspondence shows, that he was no less willing to come, than they were to receive him.

Whatever opinion may be entertained of the conduct, which the members of the Associate Presbytery afterwards pursued toward Mr Whitefield, there is no reason to question that the motives by which they were influenced, in inviting him to come and labour for a season in Scotland, were of the most laudable kind. It has been said, that they were de-

sirous, by means of his popularity, to procure attention and influence to their infant sect.* This is a mere gratuitous assumption, altogether unwarranted by any thing that appears in the correspondence carried on between them. To impute wrong motives to any class of individuals, when right ones may be found, is altogether unworthy of an honourable mind ; and it is humiliating to find writers, whose general character entitles them to respect, eagerly seizing upon actions that are at least harmless, if not laudable, in themselves, and holding them up in the most unfavourable light, that they may the more easily draw down upon an opponent the scorn and contempt of others. The “ infant sect” of the Secession did not need the popularity of Mr Whitefield, or of any other stranger, to procure for it attention and influence : it had already procured, by the intrinsic merits of its cause, a much larger share of these than its most sanguine friends either expected, or could have anticipated.

The Messrs Erskine, who corresponded with Mr Whitefield, in reference to his intended visit to Scotland, appear to have had two objects in view, in wishing him to come amongst them : The one was, that he might be instrumental, by the uncommon gifts which he possessed, in promoting a revival of religion in their native land, as he had done in many parts of England and America ; and the other was, the probability of a closer union being formed betwixt him and the Presbytery, so that they might co-operate together in carrying on the same good work. That they were not mistaken with regard to the first of these objects, the result sufficiently proved ; and certain expressions, which Mr Whitefield had used in his correspondence with them, gave them some ground to hope that the second might also be accomplished.

Mr Ralph Erskine, in some of his letters to Mr Whitefield, had given him an account of the Scottish covenants ; had detailed to him the proceedings of the Assembly, with regard to the deposition of the Seceding ministers ; had stated to him

* Sir H. Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine, p. 93.

what were the principles which the Presbytery held concerning church government ; and had also mentioned, in a friendly way, what were his own views concerning church communion ; with all which Mr Whitefield had expressed himself so far satisfied. In his answers to these communications, he stated, “ that he was willing to sit down at the feet of the Associate Presbytery, and learn the way of Christ more fully ;” and “ that he was perhaps more of their mind, as to many things, than they were aware of ;” with other expressions of similar import.* Such statements as these were certainly calculated to inspire hope, on the part of the Seceding brethren, that, should he and they be permitted to meet, such explanations might be given as would remove existing prejudices, and bring them to a mutual understanding upon points, with regard to which they now differed. It is not, however, to be disguised, that when Mr Whitefield wrote to Mr Ralph Erskine, stating to him his inclination to visit Scotland, Mr Erskine, in his reply, expressed in strong terms, his desire that Mr Whitefield, during his stay in Scotland, would, if not wholly, at least in a great measure, identify himself in his ministrations with the Associate Presbytery. In cherishing and expressing such a desire, Mr Erskine was not influenced by the paltry motive of procuring attention and influence to the “ infant sect” to which he belonged : he was influenced by motives of a much higher order. He conceived that he, and those who were connected with him in the Presbytery, were engaged in carrying forward a great public cause,—a cause which, in their estimation, deeply involved in it the glory of God, and the best interests of the human race. In giving their support to this cause, they had, by an unrighteous sentence, been deprived of their livings ; had been branded as troublers of the peace of Zion ; and had encountered no small reproach. They were engaged in a struggle, which had for its object the advancement of the work of reformation in Scotland. Such being the circumstances in which they were placed, they naturally concluded,

* Brown’s MS.

that if Mr Whitefield, after professing such a high regard for the Associate Presbytery, should make no distinction betwixt them and their persecutors, but give as much countenance in his ministrations to the latter as to the former, this would afford a just ground of triumph to their opponents, and might materially affect the success of the cause in which they were embarked. It was upon this public ground, and on this ground alone, that they expressed a desire that he would make a common cause with them, so far as he consistently could, while he continued in Scotland.

That such were the views which they entertained, the following extracts from their letters abundantly prove. Mr Ralph Erskine, in a letter dated Dunfermline, 10th April, 1741, and sent to Mr Whitefield only a few months before he arrived in Scotland, says, “ There is no face on earth I would desire more earnestly to see than yours, and there is none would be more welcome than you, with whom there is so much, I think, of our glorious Master’s spirit. Yet I would desire it only in a way that I think would tend most to the advancing of our Lord’s kingdom, and the reformation work among our hands. Such is the situation of affairs among us, that, unless you came with a design to meet and abide with us, particularly of the Associate Presbytery, and to make your public appearances in the places, especially of their concern, or by their counsel, direction, or advice, I would dread the consequences of your coming, lest it should seem equally to countenance our persecutors, and those that are opposing the work of reformation among our hands. You know upon what grounds we have made a secession ; and, as you have seen good ground to separate from the Wesleys, so we have separated from the established judicatories, and they have separated us from them, by a sentence of deposition, passed in the General Assembly ; and inferior judicatories are generally homologating, and some of them where we reside, executing the sentence as far as they can, and would do more, were it not that they fear the people, who generally flock to us, while we, in the mean time are,

through grace, going on in our work, and sometimes have the Lord sensibly with us. I would, therefore, wish for such a coming as might more and more unite the friends of truth and reformation to one another, strengthen our hands, still our adversaries, and fill their faces with shame, that they may seek His name: they want to pour all the contempt upon us, and our way, they can, though still it has redounded to their disadvantage. Your fame would occasion a flocking to you, to whatever side you would turn; and if it should be in their pulpits (as no doubt some of them would urge), we know how it would be improven against us; we have been sometimes already upbraided with your having more of the Lord's presence than we, and yet never separating from the Church of England, notwithstanding of their corruptions, though it is ill argued when cases differ so much."*

After receiving this letter, Mr Whitefield wrote to Mr Ebenezer Erskine, mentioning the proposal which had been made to him by his brother Ralph, and stating that he "could not altogether come into it." He stated further, that, instead of connecting himself with any particular party, he meant to come to Scotland "only as an occasional preacher, to preach the simple gospel to all who were willing to hear him, of whatever denomination;" "that it would be wrong in him to join in a reformation as to church government, any further than he had light given him from above;" and he begged that the Presbytery "would not be offended, if, in all things, he could not immediately fall in with them."

To this letter Mr Ebenezer Erskine sent an affectionate and candid reply, in which he pointedly disclaimed, on the part of the Presbytery, any party views. After giving a brief account of the treatment which they had received from the Assembly, in being deposed from the ministry, and ejected from their churches, he adds,—“From this short glimpse of the state of matters among us, you will easily see what reason the Associate Presbytery have to say, ‘Come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty;’ for the enemy

* Gillies' Life of Whitefield, p. 275.

comes in like a flood, but I hope the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him. We hear that God is with you of a truth, and therefore we wish for as intimate a connexion with you in the Lord as possible, for building up the fallen tabernacle of David in Britain, and particularly in Scotland, when you shall be sent to us. This, dear brother, and no party views, is at the bottom of any proposal made by my brother Ralph, in his own name, and in the name of his Associate brethren. It would be very unreasonable to propose or urge that you should incorporate as a member of our Presbytery, and wholly embark in every branch of our reformation, unless the Father of Lights were clearing your way thereunto; which we pray he may enlighten in his time, so as you and we may see eye to eye. All intended by us at present is, that, when you come to Scotland, your way may be such as not to strengthen the hands of our corrupt clergy and judicatories, who are carrying on a course of defection, worming out a faithful ministry from the land, and the power of religion with it. Far be it from us to limit your great Master's commission to preach the gospel to every creature. We ourselves preach the gospel to all promiscuously who are willing to hear us. But we preach not upon the call and invitation of the ministers, but of the people, which I suppose is your own practice now in England; and, should this also be your way, when you come to Scotland, it could do the Associate Presbytery no manner of harm. But if, besides, you could find freedom to company with us, to preach with us and for us, and to accept of our advices in your work, while in this country, it might contribute much to weaken the enemy's hand, and to strengthen ours in the work of the Lord, when the strength of the battle is against us." *

These extracts sufficiently explain how far, and for what purpose, the Seceding brethren wished Mr Whitefield to co-operate with them. Their views may, by some, be pronounced sectarian. On this point each individual will, of

* Dr Fraser's Life of the Rev. E. Erskine, p. 424.

course, judge for himself. Their motives, at least, with regard to the proposed co-operation, are unimpeachable. They acted in the matter as honest conscientious men ought to have done ; and it is difficult to perceive what other course they could have pursued, consistently with the principles which they held.

On the 30th of July 1741, Mr Whitefield arrived at Leith, on his first visit to Scotland ; and though solicitations were made to him by some persons of distinction to preach at Edinburgh soon after his arrival, yet he refused to do so, being determined that the Messrs Erskine should have the first offer of his services. He accordingly hastened to Dunfermline, and made his first appearance in public in Mr Ralph Erskine's pulpit. It was immediately proposed that a conference should take place betwixt him and the members of the Associate Presbytery, with a view to a friendly discussion of the points at issue between them, and especially in reference to the form of church government. This conference took place at Dunfermline on the 5th of August. The members of Presbytery present were Messrs Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, Mr Moncrieff, Mr Gib, Messrs Thomas and James Mair, Mr Clarkson, ministers ; with two elders. Mr Whitefield, previous to the meeting taking place, had, in a conversation with Mr R. Erskine, conceded to him so far concerning his episcopal ordination, " that he would not take it again for a thousand worlds, but at the time he knew no better."* Mr Ebenezer Erskine, at the request of the brethren, opened the meeting with prayer. The question proposed for consideration was, What is the form of church government which Christ has laid down in his word ? The Seceders were desirous that they and Mr Whitefield should come to a mutual understanding on this point. Mr Whitefield expressed himself friendly to the principle of toleration,

* This fact, which is by no means creditable to Mr Whitefield's consistency, was communicated in a letter from Mr Ralph Erskine to his brother Ebenezer ; and it is here stated, on the authority of a written account, which has been found in one of Mr E. Erskine's note-books, in his own hand-writing.

and wished that each, on the subject of church government, should be allowed to hold his own particular views. In reference to the question proposed, he asked, "Whether the presbyterian government be that which is agreeable to the pattern shown in the mount, and if so, whether it excluded a toleration of those who might not have the same views, such as independents, anabaptists, and episcopalians, among whom there are good men." In answer to this question, Mr Ebenezer Erskine said, "Sir, God has made you an instrument of gathering a great multitude of souls to the faith and profession of the gospel of Christ throughout England, and also in foreign parts; and now it is fit that you should be considering how that body is to be organized and preserved, which cannot be done without following the example of Paul and Barnabas, who, when they had gathered churches by the preaching of the gospel, visited them again, and ordained over them elders in every city, which you cannot do alone, without some two or three met together in a judicative capacity, in the name of the Lord." To this Mr Whitefield replied, "That he reckoned it his present duty to go on preaching the gospel, without proceeding to any such work." It was urged, on the other side, "That it might please the Lord to call upon him, and in that case, there being none other, the flock might be scattered, and fall into the hands of grievous wolves, without any to care for them." He said, "that being of the communion of the Church of England, he had none to join with him in that work; and that he had no freedom to separate from this church, until that they cast him out." The articles of the presbyterian form of church government were then read to him, along with passages of Scripture in support of them; and one of the brethren addressed him at considerable length, for the purpose of showing him, that neither episcopacy nor independency were agreeable to the word of God.*

* This account of the conference between Mr Whitefield and the brethren of the Associate Presbytery is inserted chiefly on the authority of a memorandum, written by Mr Ebenezer Erskine in one of his note-books, and which

These efforts to convert Mr Whitefield into a presbyterian were wholly unsuccessful. When the articles, relative to presbytery, were read to him, he made no objections to them, neither did he attempt any reply to the arguments which were urged against the other forms of government. What he chiefly pled for was toleration. He professed to regard church government as a matter of no great importance; and he declared his resolution, notwithstanding all that had been said, to continue in the communion of the Church of England. The brethren never required him to subscribe the Solemn League and Covenant, neither did they ask him whether he was willing to confine his ministrations to their pulpits during his stay in Scotland. But when they found that his sentiments on the subject of church government differed so widely from theirs, they resolved, after mature deliberation, that until his views in this respect should undergo a change, they would neither hear him, nor employ him in any part of the ministerial work.*

has been lately published by Dr Fraser, in his *Life of Mr R. Erskine* (p. 333). Some of the facts are given on the authority of the late Professor Brown of Haddington, who appears to have derived his information from a written account which was handed about at the time.

* Dr Gillies, in his *Life of Whitefield* (p. 78), represents the following dialogue as taking place betwixt the brethren of the Presbytery and Mr Whitefield at their conference. Mr Whitefield having asked, what they wished him to do? their answer was, "That they did not desire him to subscribe immediately to the Solemn League and Covenant, but to preach only for them till he had farther light." "Why only for them?" asked Mr Whitefield. Mr R. Erskine replied, "They were the Lord's people." Mr Whitefield then asked, "Were no other the Lord's people but themselves? If not, and if others were the devil's people, they had more need to be preached to; that, for his part, all places were alike to him, and that if the pope himself would lend him his pulpit, he would gladly proclaim in it the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ." This account has been copied by Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, in his *Life of Dr Erskine* (p. 95). I have no hesitation in saying, that this is a caricatured description of what took place at the interview betwixt Mr Whitefield and the Seceders. I do not blame either of the respectable writers now mentioned for this caricature. They gave it as they themselves found it. But the source from which they both derived it, is one to which much credit is not to be attached, viz. Mr Whitefield's *Journals and Letters*. We have Mr Whitefield's own authority for declaring, that many things were inserted in these *Journals* which were rash and uncharitable, being written under the influence of false impressions, and for which he afterwards found

The part which the Presbytery acted on this occasion, may be thought by some to be sufficiently bigotted. On this point, each is at liberty to form an opinion for himself. I would merely add, by way of apology for them, that they were by no means singular in the sentiments which they entertained. Their conduct, in refusing to hold christian or ministerial communion with Mr Whitefield, on the ground of a diversity of opinion about church government, was quite consistent with their avowed principles. Besides, a large portion of the ministers in the Church of Scotland refused to hold communion with Mr Whitefield exactly on the same ground, and were considerably offended with some of their brethren for admitting him into their pulpits. A few years after this, a motion was brought forward in the synod of Glasgow, and carried by a large majority, having for its avowed object the preventing of ministers in the national church from employing Mr Whitefield. The motion was indeed expressed in general terms, so as to avoid the appearance of personality; and so as to give as little offence as possible to Mr Whitefield's friends; but the supporters of the motion did not con-

himself under the necessity of making an apology both from the pulpit and the press. After the following acknowledgments made by himself, with regard to the general inaccuracies contained in his Journals, I ask, what credit is due to his recorded representations of facts, especially when these representations are at variance with the statements of persons whose veracity and accuracy have never been called in question. "In my former Journal, taking things by hearsay too much, I spoke and wrote too harshly, both of the colleges and ministers of New England, for which, as I have already done when at Boston last, from the pulpit, I take this opportunity of asking public pardon from the press. It was rash and uncharitable, and though well meant, I fear did hurt."—*Note in Gillies' Life of Whitefield*, p. 36. Again, he says, "Yesterday I made an end of revising all my Journals. Alas! alas! in how many things have I judged and acted wrong. I have been too rash and hasty in giving characters both of places and persons. Being fond of Scripture language, I have often used a style too apostolical; and, at the same time, I have been too bitter in my zeal. Wild fire has been mixt with it; and I find that I frequently wrote and spoke in my own spirit, when I thought I was writing and speaking by the assistance of the Spirit of God."—*Note*, p. 152. These, it must be admitted, are candid confessions on the part of Mr Whitefield; and they show us with what caution we ought to receive the account which he gives of transactions in which he was engaged.

ceal, in the course of the debate, that he was the person to whom the motion was chiefly intended to apply.*

The result of the conference between Mr Whitefield and the Presbytery, was the breaking up of all future correspondence. The sentiments of esteem with which they had previously regarded one another, were changed into a spirit of hostility; and, in the mutual recriminations that followed, language was employed on both sides which christian charity obliges me to condemn. The Seceders were accused by Mr Whitefield of building a Babel, which would soon fall down about their ears; and he, on the other hand, was stigmatized by them as a wild enthusiast, who was engaged in doing the work of satan. A short time after the conference took place, Mr Whitefield paid a visit to Stirling; and, having entered the tent where Mr Erskine was engaged in preaching to the people, on a week-day, he sat and heard him. When Mr Erskine had finished, Mr Whitefield succeeded him in addressing the people; but Mr Erskine would not stay to hear him, on account of his having acknowledged himself to be of the communion of the Church of England. It does not appear that, after this period, Mr Whitefield had any personal intercourse with any of the brethren of the Presbytery, if we except a short interview which he had, some years afterward, with Mr Ralph Erskine, in which, notwithstanding all that had taken place, they embraced one another, and Mr Erskine said, "We have seen strange things."

A few months after these transactions, the Secession sustained a great loss in the death of one of its brightest ornaments, the Reverend Mr Wilson of Perth, who, after a life of laborious and honourable service, in the work of his Divine Master, breathed his last on the 8th of October, 1741. The incessant toil to which, after the commencement of the Secession, and more especially after his appointment to the theological professorship, he was subjected, gradually undermined a constitution that was naturally robust, and induced a prema-

* Monerieff's Life of Dr Erskine, p. 130.

ture old age. The sphere of his ministry, in such a populous town as Perth, was extensive. He had to preach, for the most part, four times a-week, besides attending to all the other public duties of his office. The chief defences of the Secession, that issued from the press, were prepared by him. In addition to all these labours, to him was assigned, by the Presbytery, as we have already seen, the charge of the young men who were training up for the office of the holy ministry; and never did a professor discharge more faithfully the duties of that sacred trust. Such was the flourishing state of the Theological Hall, under his able superintendence, that, at the time of his death, it was attended by a greater number of candidates for the ministry, than almost any similar institution in Scotland.* His frame gradually sunk under these complicated and arduous labours, and in the very midst of his usefulness was he removed from this earthly scene. He finished his useful and honourable career in the fifty-first year of his age. His death was mourned, as a public loss, not only by his congregation, and the students under his charge, but by the whole Secession Church. The following testimony to his piety and worth has been borne by one who was well qualified, from his personal knowledge of him, to give an opinion upon the subject.† “ Mr Wilson was a man of great fervour, and frequent wrestling with God,—a man that, together with his learning, evidenced much prudence and moderation, and who, in preaching, evidenced the greatest concern, heavenliness, mildness, and majesty of any that ever I heard. I can recollect that, when sitting on the *Brae* of Abernethy, hearing him, I got more insight into that marrow of the gospel, *my God*, than ever I got before or since.”‡ After the death of Mr Wilson, the theological

* Letter from Mr R. Erskine to Mr Whitefield, dated April 10, 1741.

† The late Professor Brown of Haddington.

‡ Those who wish to know more about this excellent man, will find an interesting account of him in a life lately published by the Rev. Andrew Ferrier of Newart-hill. The following anecdote connected with the death of Mr Wilson, extracted from the work now mentioned, will prove gratifying to my readers :—“ Though his illness was severe, yet hopes of recovery were

seminary was transferred from Perth to Abernethy: Mr Moncrieff having been appointed by the Presbytery to superintend the studies of the young men who were training up for the office of the holy ministry.

During the year 1742, certain events took place which excited the attention of the religious world, and called forth no small ebullition of party feeling in Scotland. In the controversy to which these events gave rise, the Secession bore a prominent part; but truth and candour require me to state, that the part which the leaders of it acted, on this occasion, was by no means creditable to their cause. Mr Whitefield's ministrations, during the preceding year, had produced a religious stir in various districts of the country. The minds of many had been seriously impressed by his empassioned mode of address, and by his rousing appeals to the conscience. Both in the large towns and in the villages, he had acquired, by his preaching, a popularity that was hitherto unprecedented; and, in consequence of the astonishing efforts which he had made, revivals in religion began to be talked of, as an almost every day occurrence. After the difference had taken place betwixt Mr Whitefield and the Associate Presbytery, his cause was warmly espoused by a number of ministers connected with the popular party in the Church of Scotland. They admitted him into their pulpits; they accompanied him in his journeys; they employed him to assist in dispensing the ordinance of the Supper; and they bestowed upon his ministrations the highest encomiums.

Amongst the number of his devoted admirers, was Mr M'Culloch, minister of Cambuslang, a man of piety, and of

entertained till the last day of his life. Hearing of his distress, his son Gilbert, who was but eleven years of age, hurried home from Abernethy, where he was attending school. But all was over when he arrived at Perth. As he approached the house, he met those who had been waiting on his father withdrawing, and, from their appearance could easily perceive what had taken place. He rushed into the room, where he found his mother and the rest of the children in tears. "Mother," said the interesting youth, grasping her hand, "We have a new claim on God to-day. You, my dear mother, have a claim on him for a husband, and my sisters, brother, and myself, have a claim on him for a father."

simplicity of heart, but not distinguished either for strength of intellect, or for literary attainments. With the view of awakening a religious concern amongst his people, he circulated amongst them printed accounts of the revivals that were taking place under the ministry of Mr Whitefield. He also preached to them, for nearly a year, on the nature and necessity of regeneration, and seems to have been truly desirous to promote their spiritual welfare. A more than ordinary concern began at length to appear amongst them. A petition, subscribed by upwards of ninety heads of families, was presented to the minister, craving that, in addition to his Sabbath-day labours, he would institute amongst them a weekly lecture; which request was readily granted. At the first and second of these meetings, nothing particular occurred; but, on Thursday, the 18th of February, during the time of the discourse, a great commotion took place in the congregation. Some of the hearers were seized with faintings and bodily convulsions; some of them clapped their hands, and beat their breasts, and cried out, *that they saw hell opened for them, and heard the shrieks of the damned*. After sermon, about fifty persons, whose minds were distressed with the most alarming apprehensions, came to the minister's house, and the greater part of the night was spent in conversing with them.

“ After this, numbers daily resorted to that place, some to hear the word, some to converse with people who were under this remarkable concern, and others with different views; and the desires and exigences of those were such that the minister found himself obliged, without any previous intimation, to provide them daily sermon, a few days excepted; and, after sermon, usually to spend some time with them in exhortations, prayers, and singing of psalms, being especially encouraged thereto, by the extraordinary success with which God was pleased, from time to time, to bless his own ordinances, in so much that, by the best information that could be had, the number of persons awakened to a deep concern about salvation, and against whom there are no

known exceptions as yet, has amounted to above three hundred ; and, through Divine mercy, the work seems to be still making considerable progress every week, and more for some weeks of late, than sometimes formerly.”*

As there was sermon almost every day, for a number of weeks, and as there were always some who were seized with convictions at each meeting, so the usual mode of procedure, in such cases was, for the persons who were thus affected to retire, at the close of the service, along with the minister, to his own house. Their names, their designations, their place of abode, and the time and manner of their being seized, were all noted down in a register kept for the purpose ; after which they were addressed according to their particular cases ; and, in these exercises, which sometimes occupied a considerable portion of the night, the minister was assisted either by probationers, or by some of the more experienced of the people. Those who fell under convictions, continued in this state for a longer or a shorter period ; some continued for a number of days, and others only for a few hours ; and, in certain cases, they experienced a sudden transition from the deepest agony to the highest joy ; and with transport they cried out, *that they had now gotten Christ, that they saw him with a pen blotting out their sins ; that they had overcome Satan, and were become new creatures.* At the commencement of the services each day, the *wounded souls* (as they were termed), were ranged in front of the tent, the most of them having their heads bound up with napkins, and dishes filled with water were placed at hand, to be ready in cases of fainting.†

Such unusual exhibitions as these, drew toward Cambuslang, the attention of ministers residing in distant parts of the country ; and the people flocked, not only from the neighbouring parishes, but from more remote districts, to this favoured spot, that they might share in the reviving influences which were there experienced. In the month of June, Mr Whitefield paid his second visit to Scotland ; and no sooner

* Robe's Narrative, p. 2.

† Scots Magazine, May 1742, p. 233.

was his arrival known, than earnest invitations were addressed to him, to come to Cambuslang. The very first day he arrived at that place, he preached to the people no fewer than three times, though he had, on the morning of the same day, preached at Glasgow. It was nearly midnight before he concluded his last discourse ; and such was the eagerness of the people to hear, that Mr M'Culloch succeeded him, and continued preaching till past one in the morning ; and, even after he had finished, it was with the utmost difficulty that they could prevail upon the people to depart. Mr Whitefield gives the following description of what he witnessed, during his repeated visits to that place :—" Persons from all parts flocked to see, and many, from many parts, went home convinced and converted unto God. A brae or hill, near the manse at Cambuslang, seemed to be formed by Providence, for containing a large congregation. People sat unwearied till two in the morning, to hear sermons, disregarding the weather. You could scarce walk a yard, but you must tread upon some, either rejoicing in God, for mercies received, or crying out for more. Thousands and thousands have I seen, before it was possible to catch it by sympathy, melted down under the word and power of God."*

But the most remarkable of all the scenes exhibited at Cambuslang, during this summer, was that which took place in the month of August, at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. Though this ordinance had been dispensed in the preceding month, at the usual time of observing it, the minister and session resolved that, on account of the peculiar circumstances in which the parish was placed, another sacramental solemnity should be observed. It was calculated that on this occasion, upwards of 30,000 persons were assembled ; and of these about 3000 communicated. All the services were conducted out of doors ; three tents were erected ; Mr Whitefield, and the following ministers, assisted, viz. Mr Webster, from Edinburgh ; Mr M'Laurin and Mr Gillies, from Glasgow ; Mr Robe, from Kilsyth ; Mr Currie, from Kinglassie ;

Mr M'Night, from Irvine ; Mr Bonner, from Torphichen ; Mr Hamilton, from Douglas ; Mr Henderson, from Blantyre ; Mr Maxwell, from Rutherglen ; and Mr Adam, from Cathcart. Of those who communicated, there were 200 from Edinburgh, 200 from Kilmarnock, 100 from Irvine, and 100 from Stewarton, besides some who were present from England and Ireland. Several persons of rank assisted as elders, in serving the tables. Mr M'Culloch, writing to a minister, and giving him an account of this solemnity, says, " Mr Whitefield's sermons on Saturday, Sabbath, and Monday, were attended with much power, particularly on Sabbath night, about ten, and that on Monday, several crying out, and a very great, but decent, weeping and mourning was observable through the auditory. On Sabbath evening, while he was serving some tables, he appeared to be so filled with the love of God, as to be in a kind of ecstasy or transport, and communicated with much of that blessed frame. Time would fail me to speak of the evidences of the power of God coming along with the rest of the assistants." " Not a few were awakened to a sense of sin, and their lost and perishing condition, without a Saviour. Others had their hands loosed, and were brought into the marvellous liberty of the sons of God. Many of God's dear children have declared that it was a happy time to their souls, wherein they were abundantly satisfied with the goodness of God in his ordinances, and filled with all peace and joy in believing. I have seen a letter from Edinburgh, the writer of which says, ' That, having talked with many christians in that city, who had been here at this Sacrament, they had owned that God had dealt bountifully with their souls at this occasion ! Some that attended here declared, that they would not for a world have been absent from this solemnity ; others cried, Now, let thy servants depart in peace, from this place, since our eyes have seen thy salvation here ! Others wishing, if it were the will of God, to die where they were, attending God in his ordinances, without ever returning

again to the world, or their friends, that they might be with Christ in heaven, as that which is incomparably best of all.' " *

The religious fervour of the people appears to have been wound up to its highest pitch at this solemnity; but, after this occasion, it began to subside; for, from this period, the daily sermons were given up, though the weekly lecture was still continued; and, when the month of November arrived, the public services of the Sabbath, which, during the summer and harvest months, had been conducted in the open air, on account of the crowds that attended, were again transferred to the church. Though Cambuslang was the chief scene of this strong religious excitement, yet it was not confined wholly to that neighbourhood; other districts experienced it, though in a more limited measure.

The events now narrated were regarded in a very unfavourable light by the Seceders. The *Cambuslang Work* (as it was ordinarily termed), and Mr Whitefield, as the chief promoter of it, were condemned by them in no measured terms. He was stigmatised as a deceiver and a destroyer of the souls of men, as one of the false Christs prophesied of in Scripture, as Satan himself transformed into an angel of light; and the religious revival which he had been instrumental in producing, was described as "the present awful work upon the bodies and spirits of men," as "a black affair," as "a gangrene that had overspread the land." The press teemed with angry pamphlets; and the pulpits resounded with loud and oft-repeated warnings against the ministrations of such a dangerous person. His friends, on the other hand, were no less strenuous in his defence. They eulogised him for his enlightened zeal, his ardent piety, his faithful preaching of the gospel, and his disinterested exertions on behalf of his perishing fellow-men. They contended that he had been honoured above almost every individual in awakening sinners to a sense of their danger, and in pro-

* Robe's Narrative, p. 38.

moting the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, both at home and abroad.*

The Associate Presbytery viewed the matter in such a serious light, that at a meeting held at Dunfermline on the 15th July, they appointed the 4th of August to be observed as a day of fasting and humiliation by all the congregations under their charge, on account of the work of delusion that was carrying on. A long statement of reasons for appointing the fast was published by them, in which they employ language concerning Mr Whitefield, and those who countenanced his ministrations, that even their fondest admirers will not now venture to defend. Speaking of Mr Whitefield, they say, "It is no wonder that the Lord hath, in his righteous displeasure, left this church and land, to give such an open discovery of their apostacy from him, in the fond reception that Mr George Whitefield has met with, notwithstanding it is notourly known that he is a priest of the Church of England, who hath sworn the oath of supremacy, and abjured the Solemn League and Covenant, endeavours, by his lax toleration principles, to pull down the hedges of government and discipline which the Lord has planted about his vineyard in this land; and, in the account he gives of his life, makes a plain discovery of the grossest enthusiasm, and most palpable error and delusion, touching his own experience with reference to the effectual application of the redemption purchased by Christ; yet because he is found to be a fit tool for bearing down a testimony for the reformation principles of this church, he is highly commended and

* Those ministers who acted the most prominent part in this controversy were Mr Adam Gib of Edinburgh, Mr Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, and Mr James Fisher of Glasgow, on the one side; and Mr James Robe of Kilsyth, Mr Alexander Webster of Edinburgh, and Mr John Willison of Dundee, on the other. The following anecdote, which has been received from a relation of Mr Gib, shows that that gentleman was afterwards sorry for the part which he took in this controversy. A friend being asked by him, whether he had read his publications, his friend replied, that he had not read his pamphlet against Mr Whitefield. Mr Gib said, "Don't read it. When I wrote it, I was warm-blooded, and it would have been much better if I had not written it."

extolled by several ministers in their printed letters, and likewise received into full communion with them. And thus, because they would choose their own way in opposition to our known principles, the Lord has also chosen their delusions in permitting the minds of multitudes through the land to be ‘corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, by departing from the faith, and giving heed to seducing spirits, who, by good words and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple;’ so that this is one of the periods wherein that threatening prophecy seems to be accomplished, 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4, *The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*”

In reference to the work of religious revival, which Mr Whitefield had been chiefly instrumental in producing and carrying on, they express themselves in the following terms: —“It is obvious, that bitter outcries, faintings, severe bodily pains, convulsions, voices, visions, and revelations, are the usual symptoms of a delusive spirit, that have appeared in the Quakers, Sevennois, Camizars, and other enthusiasts, and which no sound divine amongst us hath ever maintained as agreeable to, and concerned with, the saving operations of the Spirit of God. Nor will any of the fruits of this work that have hitherto been alleged, be sufficient to difference it either from the common work of the Spirit of God upon hypocrites, or from the delusions of Satan; but the following fruits and effects of it are undeniably evident, namely, the warmest aversion and opposition to a testimony for these very same principles which have been sworn to and suffered for unto blood in these lands; the closest conjunction with their ministers, though they are continuing to bear down these principles with a high hand, whether intruders or not; and a visible neglect, in many of them, of their relative and stational duties, contrary to the practice of Scriptural converts, and the experience of the saints of God in

this land, who, upon their conversion, still espoused the testimony of their day, and contended for the present truth : Which delusive spirit, if the Lord of his mercy prevents it not, may run out to a great length, to the throwing off of all religious and civil obligations, and involve these lands in the saddest calamities and direful confusions, as it has done in other kingdoms and states before, such as Germany, France, and other places.”

The conduct of the Presbytery, in this matter, did not pass without severe animadversion. Mr Robe, in the preface to his *Narratives*, characterized the statement of reasons which the Presbytery had published as “ full of great swelling words, altogether void of the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus, and the most heaven-daring paper that hath been published by any set of men in Britain these hundred years past.” In a pamphlet, entitled *A Friendly Caution to Seceders*, their conduct was condemned as inconsistent ; and they were charged with rashly opposing a work which had all the distinguishing marks of being a work of the Spirit. “ In friendship and faithfulness to you,” says the writer of the pamphlet, “ I must not overlook the manner in which ye anticipate an objection against your using Mr Whitefield so rudely. The objection is, How come such of you as were once in strict correspondence with Mr Whitefield as an useful minister of Christ, and one of you went even so far as publicly to attend him in the tent when he preached, to break up all friendship with him, and treat him as your greatest enemy ? Ye turn it off, by saying, *That whatever favourable expectations your Presbytery had at first formed of him, yet, when they afterwards came to have a close conversation with him, they found themselves very far disappointed, and therefore had no freedom to join in ministerial communion with him.* Truly I cannot help saying this looks rather like a blind for soothing your followers, than an honest ingenuous answer to the objection, Did ye not know him to be a Church of England priest when ye corresponded with him in the character of a successful, zealous, and assiduous

minister of Christ ? Was it not, honestly, the true and only reason of your breaking up with him, that ye evidently saw ye could not possibly maintain your principles and sentiments before mentioned, nor keep up your credit with your followers, if ye joined with him in any manner in ministerial communion ? What ! (would they say) do our leaders forbid us to hear our own parish ministers, or any other minister of the Established Church, and do they yet encourage us to hear a Church of England curate ?”

Again ; “ I was amazed to hear that ye are all united in the measure, not only of opposing Mr Whitefield, but of being very angry with him, and of boldly imputing the work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts and minds of great numbers of persons, at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, and other places, to infernal agency. Your instituting a fast, and publishing for grounds of it, Mr Whitefield’s reception in Scotland, people’s being imposed upon by several ministers attesting what has lately occurred in the west country to be the work of God, and the close conjunction of persons with their own ministers, quite astonishes me. If you must keep a fast, I beseech you change your grounds of it in the foresaid respect. Have nothing to do with Mr Whitefield, nor with the work of God at Cambuslang and elsewhere, so as to oppose, or speak any thing amiss against him or it ; for surely it is the work of God, a gracious and wonderful one ; and, allow me to say it, he is *a man of God*, *i. e.* a peculiar instrument in God’s hand for promoting our Lord’s kingdom and interest in all the parts of the world he has been in. His success in the conversion of sinners, and revival of saints, is his peculiarity, and is indeed his master’s credential. For the Lord’s sake beware of fasting for strife and debate. Allow me to ask you, if common prudence, I had almost said common sense, does not dictate Gamaliel’s advice (Acts v. 38, 39), to be a good one in this case.”

In taking a review of the whole of these proceedings, after the lapse of nearly a century, when it may be supposed that party feelings have in a great measure subsided, we are en-

abled to form a more calm and dispassionate judgment of events, than they did who lived in the hey-day of contention ; and were I, taking such a review, to attempt a vindication of the harsh and unwarrantable language which the Presbytery employed with regard to Mr Whitefield, and with regard to the work that took place at Cambuslang, at Kilsyth, and in other parts of the country, I would act in opposition to the decided convictions of my own mind. Mr Whitefield, though not without his failings, was undoubtedly a man of great piety, and most devoted, as well as persevering in his efforts to benefit the souls of men ; all the energies both of his mind and body (and these were of no ordinary kind), were consecrated by him to the service of his Divine Master. Few men have ever appeared in any church that were more honoured of God in the conversion of sinners than he was. His views of the fundamental articles of the christian faith were strictly orthodox ; and the doctrines of free grace occupied a prominent place in his ministrations. There was certainly a considerable tinge of enthusiasm about his character, but it was all employed by him in a good cause ; and the mere circumstance of his entertaining different views from the Presbytery, on the subject of church government, and on other minor points, by no means warranted the strong censorious language that was employed concerning him. He was willing to have co-operated with the Presbytery, provided they had been willing to co-operate with him, on the ground that each should be permitted to hold his own opinions on these points ; and when they found that they could not co-operate with him on the ground proposed, they ought to have left him to do all the good in his power, without any interference on their part.

Again, with regard to the work at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, and other places, if we are to condemn it as the work of Satan, and altogether a delusion, this would be to run in the face of a mass of evidence adduced by the most respectable and pious persons, that a great religious revival did take place in the circumstances above mentioned ; and if we are to re-

ject the unvarnished accounts which these persons give, with the facts which they adduce in support of them, I know not by what evidence it will be possible to establish the truth of a religious revival having taken place at any time. That there might be a good deal of extravagance, and hypocrisy, and enthusiasm, connected with the events above narrated, may readily enough be admitted; for where is the period of great religious excitement that is without them? Instances of these pernicious qualities are to be found less or more in all religious revivals. Even at the commencement of christianity itself these things were not wanting. Amongst the number of those who *professed* to have experienced the work of grace upon their hearts, there were persons who had the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof; whose conduct disgraced the cause which they pretended to support; who were “spots in their feasts of charity.” With regard to the bodily agitations, the convulsions and *outcryings*, which appear to have prevailed to a considerable extent among the people in the places above mentioned, it must be admitted, that these are not necessarily connected with the process of conversion; at the same time, it is easy to conceive how such effects may be produced by strong religious excitement operating upon a nervous frame. But even supposing that these agitations were in many instances the effects of mere natural causes, and in others the *actings* of hypocrisy to impose the more easily upon spectators, still, after all these abatements and allowances are made, there remains satisfactory evidence of much spiritual good having been done. Men of intelligence and piety, who had the best opportunities of acquiring information on the subject in dispute, and who were well qualified to form an opinion upon it, unite in testifying that many individuals, both at Cambuslang and in other districts of the country, gave decided indication, by the holiness of their lives, that they had undergone a saving change. Nor were the serious impressions thus produced, evanescent; for though, as might have been expected, there were some who returned to their former sinful practices, the great mass

appear to have kept steady in their christian profession till the end of their lives.

Mr M'Culloch, in a letter addressed to his friend Mr Robe in 1751, *nine years* after the religious awakening had taken place, gives the following account of the exemplary christian conduct of those, who had been the subjects of this revival :—

“ By the practice of justice and charity, relative duties, public-spiritedness, humility, meekness, patience, and a close and diligent attendance on gospel ordinances, heavenly-mindedness, watchfulness against all sin, especially those sins that used formerly easily to beset them, &c. they adorn the doctrines of God our Saviour, glorify their heavenly Father, and excite others to do so on their account.

“ Those of them that were cursers and swearers have laid aside that language of hell, and have learned much of the language of heaven, and to speak with holy awe of God, and things divine. Such of them as used to be often out in taverns, drinking and playing at cards, &c. till very late, or morning-hours rather, for these nine years past shun all occasions of that kind, and keep at home at night, spending the night in christian conference, things profitable for their families, and in secret and family devotion.

“ The formerly drunken or tippling sot, that used to lie a-bed till eight or nine in the morning, till he slept out last night's drunkenness, for these nine years gets up at three or four in the morning, and continues at reading his Bible and other good books, secret prayer and meditation, &c. till seven or eight o'clock in the morning, when he calls his household together for family devotion ; and does the like in the evening and at night.

“ The formerly covetous, and worldly-minded, and selfish, have got a public spirit and zealous concern for promoting the kingdom and glory of Christ in the conversion and salvation of souls : and for this end, are careful not only to live inoffensively themselves, but usefully to others, so as all about them may be the better for them : they join cheerfully to their power, and some even beyond it (so that I have sometimes seen it

needful to check some of them for too large quotas or offers) in collections for promoting the interests of religion, or for the relief of those in straits, in places near hand or far off: they carefully observe the times fixed for the concert in prayer, and joining at such times in earnest pleadings at a throne of grace for the spreading and success of the gospel, and the outpouring of the Spirit from on high on the churches.”*

To call *that* a delusion, or a work of Satan, which produced such effects as these upon hundreds of individuals, is language which cannot be justified; and that the Associate Presbytery should, by a solemn deed, have called upon the congregations under their charge to fast and humble themselves in the sight of God, on account of such a work being carried on, is conduct which their historian will not attempt to vindicate. Instead of mourning, they ought to have rejoiced at hearing of a revival having, to a certain extent, taken place within the pale of a church from which, on account of its corruptions, they had withdrawn. To have admitted that such a revival had taken place, and to have rejoiced on account of it, would not have weakened one iota of the grounds on which the Secession was originally formed: if they acted under the impression that such an admission was inconsistent with their bearing testimony against the evils that prevailed in the national church, it was a mistaken idea which they cherished. That they declared that to be a delusion, which they did not believe to be so, is a supposition which it would be highly uncharitable to make, a supposition which would be completely at variance with the known piety and integrity of their characters: but their conduct, in this matter, adds one to the many instances, that already exist, of the judgments of even good men being strongly biassed by the particular circumstances in which they are placed.

* Robe's Narrative, p. 313.

CHAPTER V.

No lay elders in the Associate Presbytery for four years. The sessions of Kinclaven and Abernethy give in the first accessions. Thomas Watson and George Dron the first elders that were enrolled. Form of accession. Anomaly connected with the session of Perth. Petition from the congregation of Kinross for one of their elders to act as a member of Presbytery. Petition refused. Unusual modes of procedure in the Presbytery. Fund for the support of students of divinity. Philosophical class instituted. Mr Robert Archibald appointed to take the charge of it. Succeeded by Mr David Wilson. Rev. Andrew Arrot of Dunnichen accedes to the Presbytery. The Presbytery sends a preacher to Ireland. A petition from Pennsylvania for sermon. The granting of the petition delayed. No Preacher to send. The Presbytery publishes an Act concerning the Doctrine of Grace. Outline of the Act. The Presbytery resolves to renew the covenants. A Bond and Acknowledgment of Sins prepared. Mr Nairn dissents. Dealings with Mr Nairn. Mr Nairn renounces his connexion with the Presbytery. Meeting of a committee at Kirkaldy. Mr Nairn's obstreperous conduct. Presbytery's Answers to Mr Nairn's Reasons of Dissent. The Presbytery engages in covenanting at Stirling. Covenanting declared to be the term of ministerial and christian communion. Congregations required to covenant. The ceremony of covenanting described. Remarks on covenanting as a duty. The Presbytery constitute themselves into a Synod. First meeting of Synod held at Stirling in March 1745. A second mission undertaken to Ireland. The Secession introduced into London. Loyalty of the Seceders. Their conduct during the Rebellion in 1745. Church discipline inflicted on two Seceders for sinful compliance with the rebels.

DURING the early period of the Associate Presbytery's existence, the forms of its procedure differed, in some respects, from those which are now observed ; and owing to peculiar circumstances, certain anomalies were sanctioned, which their

successors in office will scarcely consider to have been consistent with strict ecclesiastical form. Several years elapsed, after the formation of the Presbytery, before the different sessions over which the ministers presided acceded to the Secession ; and before, of course, elders were commissioned by the sessions to sit in the Presbytery. Some of the sessions were much longer in acceding than others : in some the act of accession was unanimous, while in others the elders were divided in opinion. The usual form in which the accession was made, was for the session to declare, by a regular deed, that they “ *took up the Testimony* :” such was the technical phraseology of the times, implying that the person or persons, who made the declaration, approved of the grounds of the Secession from the Established Church, stated by the Presbytery in the Testimony which they had published.

For upwards of four years, the Presbytery consisted wholly of ministers, without a single lay elder being present with them, or taking any part in their deliberations. It was not till the 5th of January, 1737, that the name of any elder was inserted in the Presbytery roll. On that day formal accessions were made by the sessions of Abernethy and Kinclaven. As a specimen of the solemn manner, in which these accessions were usually given, I extract from the Presbytery record the following document, which was presented from the session of Kinclaven :—

“ *Kinclaven Manse, October 25, 1736.*—Which day and place the session met, and after prayer by the minister, were present, &c. The session taking into their consideration the present lamentable condition of the Established Church of Scotland, that the General Assemblies thereof have restrained ministerial freedom in faithfulness in preaching, and the liberty of protesting against their decisions, however unlawful, and have ejected four ministers from their communion for refusing to give up with these valuable rights of the office-bearers of Zion’s King ; that gross errors and blasphemies have been vented by some members of the church, and

yet no way duly censured, nor testified against, when the cause of truth came before the supreme judicatories, whereby the cause of truth is left bleeding in our streets; That as the heritage of God, for several years past, has been oppressed by intrusions into the ministry, the same continue still to be countenanced; and likewise considering that the Established Church have refused to make a faithful acknowledgment, to the glory of God, of our own iniquities and the iniquities of our fathers, and the session having heard read the causes of the Lord's wrath against this church and land, both in former and present times, drawn up by the ministers associated together, for the exercise of government and discipline in a presbyterial capacity, it was moved what should be the duty of this session in the present juncture; whereupon one was desired to pray, and after prayer, and long reasoning upon the said motion, the question was put,—*Take up the Testimony contained in the above mentioned causes of the Lord's wrath, and accede to the Presbytery of the ministers associated for the exercise of church government and discipline, or Not?* It carried unanimously, *Take up the Testimony contained in the above mentioned causes of the Lord's wrath, in all the branches thereof; and they Did and hereby Do accede to the Presbytery of the ministers associated for the exercise of government and discipline;* and upon a leet being made, Thomas Watson was chosen to attend the meetings of Presbytery for the ensuing half year."

Thomas Watson, elder from Kinclaven, and George Dron, elder from the session of Abernethy, were the first elders whose names were placed upon the Presbytery's roll.

On the 20th of December, 1737, the sessions of Perth and Abbotshall gave in each a declaration of secession from the judicatories of the Established Church. The declaration from Abbotshall was accepted, and the elder appointed by that session was enrolled a member of the Presbytery: but the declaration from Perth did not prove satisfactory, being expressed in too general terms, and the elder whom they had appointed (Provost Brown), being called in, and having had

the sentence of Presbytery intimated to him, he declared his own approbation of the Testimony and expressed also his sorrow for having formerly taken the oath of abjuration ; whereupon the Presbytery unanimously agreed to receive him into their society, and his name was added to the roll. In the month of April, 1742, the Presbytery appointed a committee to deal with the session of Perth, with the view of bringing them to a " more complete accession " to the Presbytery than they had yet given ; and, on the 12th of August, in the same year, the committee reported that this object had been accomplished. At this period, there were *two* sessions connected with the congregation of Perth, one belonging to the town and another to the country. This anomalous mode of government was tolerated for a number of years, until, at the request of the sessions themselves, they were united into one, the Presbytery declaring such a mode of government to be inconsistent with presbyterian principles.

Previous to this period, the Presbytery had given a decision on a question, which has been repeatedly agitated in the Secession courts since, and which has been uniformly decided in the same way.* The people of Kinross having presented (July, 1737) a petition, craving leave to send an elder, who should be allowed to sit as a member of Presbytery, though they had no minister ordained amongst them, the prayer of their petition was refused, on the ground that it had been the practice of the presbyterian church since the Reformation, to permit an elder to sit only where there was a minister connected with the congregation, that thus there might always be a parity observed of lay and ministerial members in the church courts. Mr Thomas Mair was appointed to converse with the elders of Kinross upon the subject ; and having met with them in a constituted session, the report which he gave from them was, that the motion did not originate

* Since the above was written, the United Associate Synod, at their meeting in Glasgow, October 1837, have declared that vacant congregations, as well as those that have ministers ordained amongst them, are entitled to send lay representatives to the church courts.

with them, and that they did not wish to insist upon it, except in so far as the Presbytery might see meet.

Another part of the Presbytery's procedure, deserving of notice, was their conduct in reference to calls. Their preachers being few, and their vacant congregations numerous, they had generally lying on their table a number of petitions for moderations : and it was no unusual thing for them, when they met, to propose the two following votes :—" Grant any moderations at this meeting?"—and, " To what congregations shall they be granted?" Sometimes two, three, and even five moderations were granted at a single meeting, according to the number of their licentiates. When a call was presented from a congregation to be sustained, it occasionally happened, that a petition against the sustaining of the call was presented from another congregation, who pled that the Presbytery before sustaining the call, would give them an opportunity of calling the same individual ; and, irregular though the procedure may appear, the Presbytery sometimes granted the prayer of such petitioners. When the congregation of Haddington gave a call to Mr George Brown, commissioners from Perth, and also from Sticheil, appeared at the bar of the Presbytery, craving that they would delay sustaining the call, and, in the meantime, grant them a moderation with a view to the same individual. The Presbytery delayed sustaining the call from Haddington, granted the moderation to the people of Perth ; and at a future meeting they determined that Mr Brown should be ordained at Perth instead of Haddington.

The Presbytery, though in general sufficiently formal as to their mode of conducting business, yet were not at all scrupulous in dispensing with adherence to forms, in cases where the welfare of particular congregations was concerned. When a call was laid on their table, in the month of August 1742, from the congregation of Jedburgh to the Rev. Mr Thomson of Burntisland, without observing the usual formalities of summoning parties and hearing reasons, they laid aside the call, " on the ground of the present circumstances

of Burntisland.” When Mr Andrew Clarkson was ordained at Knock in the neighbourhood of Linlithgow, members of the congregation were permitted to sign the call, on the day of ordination, in the presence of the Presbytery ; and it was intimated that such as were not present that day would have an opportunity of signing it afterward in the presence of the session.

With the view of encouraging young men of piety and talents to enter upon the study of divinity, a fund was instituted, at an early period, from which pecuniary aid was given to such of the students as required it. The donation given to each student varied according to circumstances ; some received three pounds, some four, and others six. This fund was liberally supported by the infant societies connected with the Secession. In the course of two years upwards of one hundred and fifty pounds were collected ; a sum, which, when we consider the high value of money at that period, and the general poverty of those from whom it was collected, must be regarded as highly creditable to the christian liberality of the community.*

After the removal of the Divinity Hall to Abernethy, which took place, as has been already mentioned, when Mr Moncrieff was appointed professor in February 1742, a class for teaching philosophy was instituted in connexion with the Hall, and the charge of it was committed to one of the Students of Divinity. Mr Robert Archibald, who was afterwards ordained at Haddington, taught it the first year ; and after he was appointed to be taken on trials for licence, he was succeeded by Mr David Wilson in 1743, who taught the class, with considerable approbation, till near

* In looking over the disbursements from this fund, the following item deserves to be extracted, as affording a correct specimen of the spirit of the times :—“ Appoint the brethren to give out of the foresaid fund, in the interim, to Duncan M'Lachlan, Presbytery Officer, twenty-four pounds Scots, in regard that said Duncan is in great straits, being deprived of his living by the Magistrates of Stirling, because he refuses to serve the five elders who were sustained by the present judicatories as the only session of Stirling, in opposition to the lawful and right constitute session of that place.”

the time of the division in the Synod, when he resigned it. Mr Wilson received six pounds out of the Presbytery fund, at his appointment; and, though it is not mentioned, yet it is probable that he received a small sum out of the fund yearly, so long as he continued to teach. Each student was enjoined to pay him five shillings quarterly, and those, who possessed the means, were to pay him ten shillings. A committee of Presbytery was occasionally appointed to examine the students with regard to their attainments in philosophy; and at a subsequent period, after the Presbytery had formed itself into a Synod, it was enacted, that all students, before being admitted into the philosophical class, should be carefully examined and recommended by the presbyteries, in whose bounds they resided. Those young men, who had studied philosophy in any of the colleges or universities in Scotland, and who applied for admission to the study of divinity, were subjected to a rigid examination by the Presbytery, as to the soundness of their principles; for many of the teachers in the universities were not looked upon with a favourable eye, at that period.

In the month of October, 1742, the Rev. Andrew Arrot, minister of Dunnichen, renounced his connexion with the Establishment, and acceded to the Presbytery. The reasons which induced him to take this step, and which were stated at full length in a paper presented to the Presbytery, were much the same as those to which a reference has already been made in similar documents. During this and the preceeding year, the Presbytery ordained twelve ministers, and their small phalanx, consisting originally of *four*, had now increased to twenty.*

* The following were the ministers connected with the Associate Presbytery at the close of the year 1742 :—Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, Stirling; Alexander Moncrieff, Abernethy; Ralph Erskine, Dunfermline; James Fisher, Glasgow; James Thomson, Burntisland; Thomas Nairn, Abbotshall; Thomas Mair, Orwell; Adam Gib, Edinburgh; James Mair, Linton; David Smyton, Kilmaurs; William Hutton, Stow; Andrew Clarkson, Craigmaitlen; John Cleland, Balfron; George Brown, Perth; William Campbell, Ceres; Thomas Ballantyne, Sanquhar; David Horn, Cambusnethan; Patrick Mathew, Midholm; James Scot, Gateshaw; and Andrew Arrot, Dunnichen.

Besides supplying their numerous vacancies at home, they commenced, this year, a course of missionary exertion, with a view to supply the spiritual necessities of those, who, in other countries, were destitute of the gospel. So far back as the year 1736, an application had been made to them from a number of families in Lisburn, in Ireland, requesting that they would send over a person to labour amongst them; but at that time the request could not be complied with, as the Presbytery had no preachers to send. At their meeting in October, in the present year, a similar application was made to them from Templepatrick and some of the adjacent places, in the county of Antrim; and Mr Gavin Beugo was appointed on a mission to Ireland for several months. In the course of this year, also, the Presbytery received a letter from Londonderry, Chester, state of Pennsylvania, in America, containing an urgent request that they would send over either an ordained minister or a probationer to labour amongst the inhabitants of that district; and a promise was given that all the necessary charges of the mission would be defrayed. The demands, however, made upon the Presbytery for supplying the necessitous districts in their own immediate neighbourhood, were so numerous and so urgent, that they had it not yet in their power to send any of their preachers across the Atlantic. They returned a friendly reply to the American letter, but deferred, for a season, sending a labourer to that part of the vineyard.

The Presbytery, conceiving that the proceedings of the Assembly in 1717, with regard to Professor Simson's case, and also the acts which had been passed in 1720 and 1722, respecting the Marrow Controversy, had proved most injurious to the interests of gospel truth, resolved to take particular notice of these proceedings; and, at an early period (in 1738), they had appointed a committee to prepare an assertory act, with a view to vindicate the doctrine of free grace, and to counteract the pernicious errors which were then so prevalent. After a considerable delay, occasioned by the multiplicity of concerns which occupied the attention

of the Presbytery, a long and elaborate act was prepared, entitled an "Act of the Associate Presbytery concerning the doctrine of grace;" and after several meetings had been spent in mature deliberation upon the different statements which it contained, the Presbytery gave it their final sanction upon the 21st of October 1742. This act contains a great mass of excellent matter; but it partakes of the fault of most of the official documents of that period,—it is too prolix, and withal somewhat involved in its statements. The publication of it, however, was a seasonable appearance on behalf of the truth; and though some of the positions contained in it may be objected to, as stated in too strong terms, yet as the views which it gives of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and especially of the mode of a sinner's salvation by grace, to the utter exclusion of human merit, are most scriptural, it must have had a beneficial effect in checking the progress of arminianism. The following statement, taken from the preamble of the act, will show what was the general objects which the Presbytery had in view in publishing it:—"In zeal for the glory of God, and the vindication of his truth, as also for contributing what in them lies, through grace, to put a stop to the spreading of legal and arminian doctrine, wherewith the whole land is like to be overflown, to the ruin of many precious souls, who, by the Lord's blessing upon this mean of his appointment, may come to be established in the truth, as it is in Jesus, the Associate Presbytery did, and hereby do judge it their duty, according to the powers given them by the Lord Jesus Christ as a judicatory of his house, to assert the truth from the holy Scriptures, and our standards of doctrine, concerning the *free grace* of God in the salvation of mankind lost, in opposition to the corrupt doctrine vented in some acts of Assemblies, darkening and enervating the same. And to this they reckon themselves the more warranted and obliged, in regard that the salvation of sinners is manifestly endangered by errors and mistakes anent the nature of truth, and God's gift of eternal life to us, the complete satisfaction of the

glorious surety, the absolute freedom of the covenant of grace, and other important doctrines which are opposed and subverted by the acts of Assembly after-mentioned."

In this act, the Presbytery enter fully into a vindication of those doctrines taught by the Marrow-men, which the Assembly thought proper, first to misrepresent, and then to condemn. As the questions discussed in the act concerning the doctrine of grace have of late been revived, and are at present exciting considerable attention in the religious world; and as the acts of Assembly passed in 1720 and 1722, have lately been employed as tests of orthodoxy, and made use of for the purpose of expelling labourers from the pale of the Establishment, it will not be foreign to the object of this work, to give a short account of the sentiments which the first Seceders entertained concerning these acts of Assembly, and concerning the doctrines which they condemned.

In considering the acts of Assembly now mentioned, the *first* point noticed by the Presbytery, is the "*injury done to the doctrine of grace, under the head of universal atonement and pardon.*" One of the charges brought against the supporters of the Marrow by the Assembly, was countenancing the doctrine of *universal redemption as to purchase*. This doctrine the Presbytery declare they reject and condemn as contrary to the Scriptures, and places of the Confession and Larger Catechism quoted by the Assembly; and they farther declare, that no such doctrine is taught in the Marrow. The author, they say, has expressly declared himself for a *particular* redemption and representation, as he plainly teaches, through the whole of his book, that Christ represented and suffered for none but the elect; and seeing that the passages quoted from the Marrow cannot be interpreted as favouring the doctrine of universal redemption, they consider that the sentence of the Assembly must be intended as condemnatory of something else. On this subject they add, "It will be obvious, from the tenor and strain of the Assembly's act, that, under the misapplied title of universal redemption as to *urchase*, they condemn the universal and

unlimited *offer* of Christ unto mankind-sinners *as such*. For though the Assembly 1722 seems to own, that the revelation of the divine will in the word affords a warrant to offer Christ unto all, and a warrant for all to receive him, yet they can own that warrant only in a consistency with their notion of faith ; that is, a warrant only for the *elect*, or those who are *so and so qualified* to receive Christ. But they do not own that mankind sinners, *as such*, however sinful and miserable, have any such warrant. And consequently, the revelation of the divine will in the word, making such a gift of Christ to the world of mankind-sinners, as affords a warrant to offer Christ unto all without exception, or to preach the gospel to every creature, and a warrant for all to receive him ; and the sovereign grace that has made this grant or deed of gift, not to devils but to men,—are encroached upon, and injured by the acts of both Assemblies 1720 and 1722.”

The Presbytery then state what their own views are of this doctrine ; and the sentiments which they maintain concerning it are, “ that though the purchase and application of redemption be peculiar to the *elect*, yet the warrant to receive Christ is common to *all*, as they are sinful men and women of Adam’s family. The *gift* of Christ mentioned in Scripture, is not to be understood of a giving unto *possession*, which is peculiar to them only who believe. But is a giving by way of *offer*, whereupon one *may* take possession ; or such a giving as warrants a man to believe or receive the gift, and therefore must be *before* actual receiving : Even as the manna behoved to be given or rained down before it could be tasted or fed upon. The persons to whom this grant and offer is made are not the *elect* only, but mankind considered *as lost*. For the record of God being such a thing as warrants *all* to believe on the Son of God, it is evident that it can be no such warrant to tell men that God hath given eternal life to the elect : As the offering of a gift to a certain select company, can never be a warrant for all men to receive or take possession of it.”

The *second* point noticed by the Presbytery concerning the acts of the Assembly 1720 and 1722, is the injury done by them to the doctrine of grace, *concerning the nature of faith*. The Assembly condemned the author of the Marrow for asserting that the justifying act of saving faith is, “a man’s being persuaded that Christ is *his*, and that *he* shall have life and salvation by him ; and that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it *for him*.” This definition of saving faith the Presbytery adopt, as being the one which they consider most agreeable to Scripture and the standards of the church ; while they condemn as vague and unsatisfactory the following account which the Assembly give of faith, viz. :—“ That a belief and persuasion of the mercy of God in Christ, and of Christ’s ability and willingness to save all that come unto him, is necessary unto justifying faith.” Such a persuasion as this, the Presbytery declare, may be possessed by devils and reprobates, and cannot, therefore, constitute justifying faith. With regard to those passages which the Assembly adduce from Scripture, and from the Confession and the Larger Catechism, to show that assurance is not of the essence of faith, the Presbytery remark, that these passages apply to the *assurance of faith* or reflection (whereby believers are certainly assured, that they are in a state of grace, upon the evidence of those marks which the Lord hath given of his own work in the soul), and to the *assurance* which is *in faith*, in the direct act thereof, and which is founded upon the word only. They add, “ The question is not here concerning the *present state* of the *person*, which he is called to examine, according to the rules of God’s word ; but the question is concerning the *nature* of that *faith* which all the hearers of the gospel are called unto, and which the Scripture plainly describes to be a *believing* in God, and a *trusting* in his salvation, a *receiving* of Christ, a believing the record that God hath given to us eternal life ; that he will be our God, and that we shall be his people ; and so calling him *our* Father, *our* Husband, *our* God, upon the warrant of his own word of grace. There

is a great difference between the *assurance of our state of grace*, and the *assurance of the promise of salvation*; or an assured faith of righteousness and salvation in Christ Jesus, as held forth to every sinner to whom the gospel comes, to be received and applied by them for *their own* benefit. The assurance spoken of in the articles of our Confession of Faith, and Catechism cited by the Assembly, is an assurance that the faith which *we have* is indeed the faith of God's elect, or that we are *already in a gracious state*; and a believer may wait long before he obtain this assurance, according to our Confession and Catechisms; yet this says nothing against a man's being persuaded that Christ is *his*, as held out, and made over in the promises unto him. From all which it follows, that these passages of Scripture and our standards do by no means condemn the assurance which is in the *direct act* of faith, or the *appropriating* persuasion of faith, corresponding to the gift of Christ in the gospel." "Upon the whole, the Assembly, by condemning the above description of faith, have both condemned the Scripture account of the true nature of faith, and also the Scriptural *order* in which faith appropriates or closes with its object. For the first thing to be believed, or to be persuaded of, upon the grant that God has made of Christ unto mankind-sinners in the word, is, that *Christ is ours*: Upon which there will follow, according to the measure of faith, a persuasion that *we shall have life and salvation by him*, and that *whatsoever he did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for us*."

The *third* point which the Presbytery notice, in reference to the acts of Assembly 1720 and 1722, is the injury done by these acts to the doctrine of grace, in *ascribing to good works a causal influence upon our eternal salvation*. In these acts the Assembly enjoin ministers to preach the doctrine of the *necessity of an holy life, in order to the obtaining of everlasting happiness*. And they assert, that it is of dangerous tendency to teach, "That the law acknowledges no works for obtaining salvation, but such as found a *title* to it before the Lord; whereas (say they), the law requires good works

in order to the *obtaining salvation*, though they do not found a title to it."

Concerning these statements, the Presbytery observe,—
“ The plain scope and tendency of all this, is to countenance and pave the way for the arminian and baxterian doctrine, of the gospel being a new, proper perceptive *law*, with sanction,—binding to faith, repentance, and other duties which are consequential to the entrance of sin and the revelation of the grace of God in the gospel; our personal obedience to which is necessary for obtaining everlasting happiness; for, though the Assembly owns that the righteousness of Christ founds our *title*, yet, according to them, we ourselves are to work for the *possession*.” “ It cannot but be matter of the deepest humiliation to all the true lovers of Zion, that ever such doctrine should be inculcated by the authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, whereby so wide a door is opened to arminian and socinian errors, which, like a flood, have overflowed this church and land. Nor will it vindicate the Assembly, that they speak of obtaining the *enjoyment* and *possession* of everlasting happiness by a holy life; but not a *right* and *title* to it, which they allow that all justified persons have already attained. For,

“ 1. The condemned passages of the Marrow, on this head, speak not of salvation *completed*, or everlasting happiness in heaven, but of salvation *commenced*, or begun on earth; and many places of Scripture speak, as the author does, of salvation *obtained already*, in this life. Now, surely, we hold our *possession* of this begun salvation, not by *our works*, or holy life, but by *grace*, as it reigns through the righteousness of Jesus Christ unto eternal life. While the Assembly's restricting the term *salvation*, unto the *complete* enjoyment of salvation, is plainly for the sake of this dangerous principle, that though our faith and good works are not meritorious, or the cause of our *justification*, yet they are the cause of our *eternal salvation*, a federal and conditional mean thereof.

“ 2. Whereas the foresaid act of Assembly declares, that

the obtaining of everlasting happiness is meant of obtaining the *enjoyment* and *possession* thereof, and not of a right and title thereto : it will follow, in a consistency with this act, that it is sound doctrine to teach, that we obtain the *right* to heaven by *Christ's* doing and obedience ; but we obtain the *possession* of it by *our own* doing, or personal holiness. But the Scripture asserts, that not only the right and title, but also the possession, both the begun and complete possession, are purchased and obtained by the blood of Christ ; though holiness, being a great part of that salvation whereof believers are here possessed, is also necessarily connected with, and preparative unto, the full possession of eternal life hereafter. And how strange would it be in heaven to say, though we cannot boast that we have obtained a *right* to heaven, yet we have obtained the *possession* of it by our holy life. Our title to this salvation we now enjoy, was obtained by *Christ's* obedience, but our *possession* of it was obtained by *our own* obedience."

While the Presbytery make these statements, they, at the same time, cordially acknowledge the necessity of holiness and good works, in their own place. They maintain that they are *necessary*, as an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, and in obedience to his command, as being the end of our election, redemption, and effectual calling, as a part of that salvation which is begun here, and perfected hereafter,—as being expressions of our gratitude, and as being a special design of word and ordinances ; and, finally, they are necessary for making our calling and election sure.

The Presbytery, after vindicating the doctrine of the *grace of God* from the injuries done to it by the acts of Assembly 1720, and 1722, show, in the concluding part of their act, that the holy law, as a *rule of duty*, is still obligatory under the gospel, and that the incitements to obedience which the gospel yields, are stronger and more powerful than any thing which the law itself, abstractly considered, can afford. In this part of the act, they show that the leading principle of obedience to the law, is faith in Jesus Christ ; that the mo-

tive from which evangelical obedience proceeds, is the consideration of the matchless love and mercy of God, manifested in Christ; that this obedience is influenced by holy affections, such as love, delight, filial fear, and the like, and that it is performed with a view to promote the honour of Christ, and the glory of God.

Such is an outline of the act concerning the doctrine of grace, which the Presbytery published, to arrest the progress of arminianism, on the one hand, and to guard their people against turning the grace of God into licentiousness, on the other; and there is reason to believe that the publication of it was blessed for accomplishing both of these purposes. Whatever may be the opinion entertained concerning the Marrow doctrines, which are avowedly defended in this document, it is impossible not to admire the zeal which these good men displayed in the vindication of the truth. Tremblingly alive to every thing that affected the interests of godliness, and the honour of their Redeemer, the grand object which they kept steadily in view, was maintaining, pure and uncorrupted, the truth as it is in Jesus. *Grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ*, was their darling theme,—a theme which warmed their affections, which employed their pens, which gave life and energy to their preaching, and to the frequent publication of which they were indebted, more than to any thing else, for the great success which attended their ministrations among the people.

At the same meeting at which they sanctioned the above act, the Presbytery agreed to engage in a work, to which they, in common with the great mass of the Scottish clergy, attached much importance, viz. “Renewing the Covenants.” This work had, for a considerable period, been neglected in Scotland, and the Presbytery regarded the neglect of it as one chief cause of the divine displeasure; they also expected that the revival of it would be a mean of bringing about the reformation which they so ardently desired. That they might engage in this work with all due solemnity, and in a

manner suited to their present circumstances, they had appointed a committee to prepare a bond or covenant, which was to be sworn to, and subscribed by all the members;—and, imitating the practice which had been observed during the covenanting periods, in Scotland, it was agreed that there should be prefixed to the bond an acknowledgment of sins. A draught of both of these was presented to the Presbytery, at their meeting on the 21st of October, under the title of “*Act of the Associate Presbytery, for renewing the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three nations ; in a way and manner agreeable to our present situation and circumstances in this period.*”

This draught was approved of by all the members present, with the exception of Mr Nairn, who, having adopted the views of the old dissenters, in relation to civil government, objected to the sentiments contained in the following paragraph, of the acknowledgment of sins, wherein the Presbytery bewail, on the one hand, the sentiments of those who impugn the yielding of subjection to the present civil authority of the country, in lawful commands ; and, on the other, the equally dangerous opinion of those who inculcate the lawfulness of propagating religion by offensive arms :—“ We desire to be humbled for the dangerous extreme that some have gone into, of impugning the present civil authority over these nations, and subjection thereunto in lawful commands, on account of the want of those qualifications which magistrates ought to have, according to the word of God and our covenants, even though they allow us in the free exercise of our religion, and are not manifestly unhinging the liberties of the kingdom,—an opinion and practice contrary to the plain tenor of Scripture, and to the known principles of this church, in her confession and covenants, and of all other reformed churches ; and that some few carry their zeal against the defections and evils of the times, to the dangerous extreme of espousing principles in favour of propagating religion by offensive arms, quite contrary to that disposition which ought to be in all the professed followers

of Christ, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Against the adopting of this paragraph, Mr Nairn offered to dissent, as the views which he entertained on these points differed from those of his brethren; but the Presbytery prevailed upon him to delay taking this step till their next meeting, with the understanding that he would then have an opportunity of entering his dissent, if his sentiments remained unchanged; and, in the mean time, all the members were to be furnished with copies of the bond and acknowledgment of sins, that the same might be maturely considered by them, and that they might be prepared to state their difficulties, should any occur to them before next meeting.

When the Presbytery met at Stirling, on the 22d of December, Mr Nairn brought the subject of his dissent again before the court; and, after an unsuccessful attempt had been made to remove his objections, at an extrajudicial conference which the brethren held with him, the dissent was received, but the further consideration of it was deferred till a future meeting. The business was again resumed, at Edinburgh, on the 3d of February, in the following year. Besides Mr Nairn, two of the brethren, Messrs Moncrieff and Campbell, objected to the above paragraph being retained in the acknowledgment of sins, on the ground that the cognizance of civil affairs belongs not to a church judicatory; and, as the Presbytery had already declared that it was not proper to swear civil allegiance in an oath imposed only by the church; so, if the sinfulness of opposing the civil magistrate in his just rights were confessed in the acknowledgment of sins, upon which the bond reduplicated, this would be equivalent to a blending of civil and ecclesiastical matters in the oath of God. In compliance with the suggestions of these brethren, the paragraph containing the statements above recorded, was withdrawn from the confession of sins, and made the subject of a separate act; and, as Mr Nairn, in his reasons of dissent, had advanced sentiments which, in the opinion of the Presbytery, were

subversive of civil magistracy, the Presbytery resolved that, unless he retracted these principles, they would proceed against him according to the rules of the church.

This resolution of the Presbytery being intimated to Mr Nairn, he craved that it might be marked, that the sentiments which he held on the points at issue, were the same as those entertained by the old dissenters; that he could not conscientiously approve of the condemnation of these sentiments by the Presbytery; that he was of opinion that the mode adopted for renewing the covenants should be the same as that which was pursued by the covenanters, when they engaged in a similar work, at Auchensaugh, near Douglas, in July 1712; and, finally, that if the Presbytery adhered to the mode pointed out in their present act, it could not be styled a *renewing* of the covenants, but would be the imposition of quite a different oath. When Mr Nairn found that his brethren, so far from acquiescing in his views, were resolved, that he should either retract his anti-government principles, or be subjected to the censures of the church, he laid on the Presbytery's table a paper of secession and appeal to the first faithful reforming judicatory, and then withdrew. In this paper he declared his adherence to his former reasons of dissent; which were, first, that the Associate Presbytery's bond for renewing the covenants was not the same in words with that sworn by our ancestors, and was not therefore a renovation of these covenants, but an imposition upon the people of a new covenant; and, secondly, that the civil part of the covenant was altogether omitted, which, he insinuated, was done from a consciousness that the acknowledging of the present civil government was inconsistent with our ancient covenants.

Mr Nairn having thus renounced the authority of the Presbytery, a committee was appointed to meet at Kirkaldy, that they might prepare an overture concerning the whole affair. On the day appointed for their meeting, the committee found that the doors of the church were locked against them, by some of Mr Nairn's friends; but having,

after some delay, procured admission by means of that portion of the congregation who were dissatisfied with Mr Nairn's conduct, they spent some time in prayer, and then proceeded to consider what course ought to be pursued in the business which had called them together. In the midst of their deliberations, Mr Nairn entered the church, mounted the pulpit, and, addressing himself in angry and reproachful terms to the members of committee, summoned them to appear before the judgment-seat of the great God, to answer for their conduct. The committee prudently refrained from making any reply, considering it altogether in vain to attempt reasoning with a person apparently so much under the influence of irritation : whereupon Mr Nairn withdrew. The committee spent some time in conversation with the people on those points, concerning which Mr Nairn had expressed himself dissatisfied with the conduct of the Presbytery ; and endeavoured to show them the erroneous nature of the opinions which he maintained. But, as it was not the congregation alone that was concerned in this matter, the committee appointed some of their number to prepare answers to Mr Nairn's papers, which he had given in to the Presbytery ; that, by the publication of them, the topics in dispute might be set in a clear light ; and, at the same time, a public declaration made of the Presbytery's principles concerning civil government.*

The Presbytery, at a subsequent meeting, approved of a draught of the answers, which was submitted to them by their committee ; and, after two weeks had been spent by them at Stirling, in considering a declaration and defence of their principles, with respect to civil government, the whole was formally sanctioned by them, on the 29th of September 1743, and a short while after published under the title of *Answers by the Associate Presbytery, to Reasons of Dissent and Secession, given in to them by the Rev. Thomas Nairn ; together with a Declaration and Defence of the Associate Presbytery's principles, anent the present civil government.* In

* Brown's MS.

the *first* part of this document, the Presbytery endeavour to show, that the mode which Mr Nairn wished them to adopt, in renewing the covenants, is unreasonable, impracticable, and unprecedented in the church ; and they vindicate themselves against the charge of attempting any innovation upon the example which had been set them, in this respect, by the Scottish reformers. In the *second* part, they maintain the affirmative side of the following question, “ Ought we not to acknowledge the civil authority of the government of these nations, and to yield subjection thereunto in lawful commands ? ”

In answering this question in the affirmative, the Presbytery maintained it as a principle founded on the word of God, and agreeable to the confessions of all the reformed churches, “ That, as the defection of a nation from a reformation previously attained, doth not deprive them of a right to choose civil magistrates for themselves ; and that as subjection to them, and obedience to their lawful commands, continues a duty incumbent upon the minority who adhere to the covenanted reformation : so also, that these *civil rights* of the nation, and their magistrates, did neither arise from, nor were innovated by the reformation once attained. True religion is not only the church’s blessing, but her very substance ; so that true religion and a true church cannot be divided. Now, if true religion became a part of the civil constitution, it inevitably follows, that the church became a part of the state ; which doctrine, as it is absurd in itself, so it lays a plain foundation for erastianism, overturning the distinction betwixt the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdoms of this world. Moreover, if the true religion (which is spiritual and supernatural), became a part of the civil constitution, then it could no longer remain a *civil*, but became a *religious*, a spiritual, a supernatural constitution.”

The Presbytery further maintained that “ the public good of outward and common order, in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those in-

vested with magistracy can propose, in a sole respect unto that office. And as, in prosecuting this end civilly, according to their office, it is only over men's good and evil works that they can have any inspection, so it is only over these which they must needs take cognizance, for the said public good; while, at the same time, their doing so must be in such a manner, and proceed so far allenarly, as is requisite for that end, without assuming any lordship immediately over men's consciences, or making any encroachment upon the special privileges and business of the church; and, moreover, as the whole institution and end of their office are cut by, and lie within the compass of, natural principles, it were absurd to suppose that there could or ought to be any exercise thereof towards its end, in the foresaid circumstances, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles; as indeed there is nothing especially allotted and allowed unto magistrates, by the word of God, and the confessions of the reformed churches, but what can be so."*

The Presbytery resumed their preparations for renewing the covenants, which had been interrupted by their dispute with Mr Nairn. In addition to the acknowledgment of sins, and the bond which had already been prepared, it was thought proper that there should be a confession of sins, and a bond peculiar to the ministry. A draught of these was laid before the Presbytery on the 3d of November, and formally sanctioned by them; and all the necessary arrangements being completed, they appointed a meeting to be held at Stirling, in the month of December, when they resolved to engage in the work of covenanting. This meeting took place on Wednesday the 28th of the month. The Tuesday preceding was observed as a day of fasting and humiliation, when the brethren engaged in devotional exercises, and made a solemn confession of their sins, and pledged themselves to a more faithful and diligent performance of the duties connected with their ministry. Wednesday, which was the day appointed for the renewing of the covenants, was also set

* Gib's Display, vol. i. p. 274 and 311.

apart as a day of fasting and humiliation. The services of the day were commenced by Mr Ebenezer Erskine preaching a sermon from Isaiah xxii. 24, "And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house," &c. Mr Fisher then offered up prayer to God, and gave out a psalm; after which the National Covenant, the Solemn League and Covenant, the Acknowledgment of Sins, and the Engagement to duties, or bond which the Presbytery had prepared, were read. Mr Thomas Mair next prayed for the divine blessing to rest upon them in the solemn work in which they were engaged. The following bond was then read by Mr Ebenezer Erskine, while all the ministers stood, and with hands uplifted to heaven, in the presence of a large congregation, publicly entered into covenant with the Lord God of their fathers :—

"We all, and every one of us, though sensible of the deceitfulness and unbelief of our own hearts, and however frequently perplexed with doubts and fears anent our actual believing, yet desiring to essay, in the Lord's strength, and in obedience to his command, to glorify God, by believing his word of grace contained in his covenant of promise, and in the faith of his promise, do devote ourselves unto the Lord in a covenant of duty; WE DO, with our hands lifted up to the most High God, hereby profess, and before God, angels, and men, solemnly declare, that, through the grace of God, and according to the measure of his grace given unto us, we do, with our whole hearts, take hold of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only propitiation for our sins; his *Righteousness* as the only foundation of our access to, and acceptance with God; his *Covenant* of free and rich promises as our only charter for the heavenly inheritance; his *Word* for our perfect and only rule of faith and practice; his *Spirit* for our alone guide to lead us unto all truth revealed in his holy word, unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. We avouch the Lord to be *our* God. And in the strength of his promised grace, we *promise* and *swear*, by the great

name of the Lord our God, that we shall walk in his way, keep his judgments and commandments, and hearken to his voice: And particularly, that we shall, by the Lord's grace, continue and abide in the profession, faith, and obedience of the foresaid true and reformed religion, in doctrine, worship, presbyterial church government and discipline; and that we shall, according to our several stations, places, and callings, contend and testify against all contrary evils, errors and corruptions; particularly, popery, prelacy, deism, arianism, arminianism, and every error subversive of the doctrine of grace; as also independency, latitudinarian tenets, and the other evils named in the above confession of sins.

“ In like manner we *promise* and *swear*, that, by all means which are lawful and warrantable for us, according to the word of God, the approven and received standards of this church, and our known principles, we shall, in our several stations and callings, endeavour the reformation of religion in England and Ireland; in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God: And to promote and advance our covenanted conjunction, and uniformity in religion; Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Form of Church-government, and Directory for Worship, as these were received by this church.

“ And in regard we are taught by the word of God, and bound by our covenants, national and solemn league, to live together in the fear of God, and in love to one another, and to encourage one another in the work and cause of the Lord; and that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world: Therefore, in a dependance on the Lord's grace and strength, we in the same manner do *promise* and *swear*,—That we shall, in our several places and callings, encourage and strengthen one another's hands in pursuing the end and design of this our solemn oath and covenant; and that we shall endeavour a life and conversation becoming the gospel of Christ: And that, in our personal callings and particular families, we shall study to be good examples to one another

of godliness and righteousness; and of every duty that we owe to God and man: And that we shall not give up ourselves to a detestable indifferency and neutrality in the cause of God; but, denying ourselves and our own things, we shall, above all things, seek the honour of God and the good of his cause and people: And that, through grace, forsaking the counsels of flesh and blood, and not leaning upon carnal confidences, we shall endeavour to depend upon the Lord, to walk by the rule of his word, and to hearken to his voice by his servants. In all which, professing our own weakness, we earnestly pray to God, who is the Father of mercies, through his Son Jesus Christ, to be merciful unto us; and to enable us by the power of his Holy Spirit, that we may do our duty, unto the praise of his grace in the churches. Amen."

After this solemn ceremony was finished, all the ministers present subscribed the bond, in presence of the congregation, in the following terms:—

"We, under-subscribing ministers, members of the Associate Presbytery, do subscribe the above bond with our hands; at Stirling, this twentieth-and-eighth day of December, One thousand seven hundred and forty-three years: The said bond having been this day first solemnly sworn by us,"

"EBENEZER ERSKINE, Minister at Stirling.

RALPH ERSKINE, Minister at Dunfermline.

JAMES THOMSON, Minister at Burntisland.

ALEX. MONCRIEFF, Minister at Abernethy.

THOMAS MAIR, Minister at Orwell.

JAMES FISHER, Minister at Glasgow.

DAVID SMYTON, Minister at Kilmaurs.

WILLIAM HUTTON, Minister at Stow.

ADAM GIB, Minister at Edinburgh.

ANDREW CLARKSON, Minister at Craigmalen.

JOHN CLELAND, Minister at Balfron.

GEORGE BROWN, Minister at Perth.

WILLIAM CAMPBELL, Minister at Ceres.

THOMAS BALLANTYNE, Minister at Sanquhar.

DAVID HORN, Minister at Cambusnethan.

Mr Moncrieff then prayed, and the services of the day were concluded by Mr Ralph Erskine preaching a sermon from Deuteronomy xxvi. 17, 18. "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God," &c. Four members of Presbytery who were absent, on this occasion, viz. Mr James Mair, Linton, Mr Patrick Matthew, Midholm, Mr John Whyte, Dunse, and Mr James Scot, Gateshaw, engaged in the same work at Falkirk, on the 14th of March ensuing, along with Mr Henry Erskine, who had been ordained minister at Falkirk on the preceding day.*

When the Presbytery met at Edinburgh, on the 14th day of February 1744, an overture was laid before them, having for its object the fixing of the terms of ministerial and christian communion. This overture, the Presbytery, after due deliberation, resolved to adopt: By it they enacted, "That the renovation of the national covenant of Scotland, and the solemn league and covenant of the three nations, in the manner now agreed upon and proposed by the Presbytery, shall be *the term of ministerial communion* with this Presbytery. And likewise of *christian communion*, in the admission of people to sealing ordinances; secluding therefrom all opposers, contemners, and slighers of the said renovation of our covenants. And, moreover, as the Presbytery judge that much tenderness and lenity is to be used with the weakest of Christ's flock, who are lying open to light, and *minting* to come forward in the said cause; that they may not be, at first instance, secluded from sealing ordinances: So they agree that all such are to be secluded who, after deliberate pains taken for their information, with all due meekness and patience, shall be found, by the session or superior judicatories they are in subjection unto, to be neglecters and shifters of this important moral duty; or not to be, themselves, in the due use of means, for light and satisfaction thereanent."

This determination the Presbytery judged to be "agreeable to the word of God, the principles of this church, and the duty of the Lord's remnant in these lands." And they

* Gib's Display, Vol. I. p. 258.

declared that “ it is in reality a proper and stedfast adherence to the unerring rule of faith and manners, in opposition to the various deviations therefrom in our day, that is, by the said act, made *the term* of communion ; and consequently no other term of communion is thereby imposed, than what the alone Lord of the conscience has prescribed. While the proposed renovation of our solemn covenants is not to be considered as *one particular duty*, made the term of communion, exclusively of or preferably to others, but as the *general* and *seasonable* form of avouching *all the principles and duties* of our holy profession.”*

By another act, which was passed on the following day, the Presbytery appointed, “ That the *Solemn Acknowledgment* of the public sins and breaches of our covenants shall be publicly joined in and made ; whereupon these covenants shall be publicly sworn and subscribed in the bond, by all such (in settled and vacant congregations), as shall *willingly offer themselves* to the Lord, in this solemn work and duty :” And “ that none shall be admitted to swear or subscribe the covenants, but such as have a competent measure of knowledge ; are free of all known scandal, and have a conversation becoming the gospel ; as these only can make a credible profession of willingly offering themselves to the Lord in this work.”

Notwithstanding this appointment, it does not appear that almost any of the Secession congregations engaged in the work of covenanting, till several years after this period. The only exceptions to this statement were the congregations of Abernethy, Ceres, and Orwell ; in these the appointment of the Presbytery, with regard to the renewing of the covenants, was carried into effect during the year 1744 ; but the farther progress of the work was interrupted by the unhappy dispute, which commenced soon after, respecting the Burgess Oath.

As the work of *Renewing the Covenants*, to which our ancestors attached so much importance, has for a number of years

* Gib's Display, Vol. I. p. 258.

gone into disuetude throughout the Secession, in all probability never to be revived, and as many of the present generation have never witnessed such a solemnity, it may be gratifying to some of my readers to peruse an account of the manner in which this work was usually performed.

When any congregation was about to engage in the work of covenanting, public intimation was given several weeks beforehand ; and frequent meetings of session were held, to converse with, and to receive such as offered themselves to join in the covenant. On the day appointed, which was usually the fast before the sacramental occasion, the minister of the congregation, assisted by several of his brethren, proceeded to the work in the following manner :—First, a sermon was preached, accompanied by the usual devotional exercises of prayer and praise ; after which the minister took notice of the solemn work in which they were about to engage ; and, having prayed again, he read out the names of those who were to join, all of them being seated together ; Secondly, the National Covenant, the Solemn League and Covenant, the Acknowledgment of sins, and the Engagement to Duties, or Bond, were read ; all the ministers present reading a portion by turns, and each usually commencing with a short prayer ; Thirdly, the minister who presided offered up a prayer of solemn confession and supplication, which was followed with praise. The oath of the bond was then administered, all the people standing up, and holding up their right hands ; and an exhortation being addressed to the covenanters, the work was concluded with prayer and praise. If after these services there remained a sufficient portion of time, the bond was subscribed by those who had sworn ; and the whole was followed by a sermon. But if, as was sometimes the case, there was not sufficient time, a sermon was preached on the following day, when an opportunity was given to subscribe the bond, in the presence of the minister and some of the session.*

Much has been said and written concerning the work of

* Gib's Display, Vol. I. p. 251.

covenanting. That in certain circumstances it may be a duty, is a position which few will be inclined to controvert. At the same time, much depends upon the nature of the covenant, which we are required to subscribe, in order to determine whether our assenting to it be a duty or not. With regard to the first Scottish covenanters, their conduct in banding together admits of a satisfactory vindication, on the ground that their civil and religious liberties were completely at stake, and that they were contending for every thing dear to them, both as men and Christians. Their covenant, viewed as a league of mutual defence against “the popish and prelatical factions” with whom they had so frequently to struggle, demands our approbation; and if the framers and subscribers of it had limited themselves to this object, their conduct would have been unexceptionable. But like all the parties, who rose and fell during the struggles of that eventful period, they made aggressions upon the religious liberties of others; they made use of the covenant as an instrument for enforcing a uniformity in matters of religion, by means of civil penalties; they violated the rights of conscience, when they made the subscribing of their bond the test of a person’s holding any office, civil, military, or ecclesiastical. In this respect, their conduct deserves not praise but blame.

The members of any religious society have a right, if they shall think proper, to enter into an agreement or covenant, mutually pledging themselves that they will be faithful to their God, true to their religion, and that they will exert themselves by every lawful and scriptural method to promote their common cause; nay more, should it be a time of peril and alarm, in which they live, as was the case with our forefathers, they may pledge themselves to stand by one another, in defence of their lives and their liberty. This is all the length to which the work of covenanting can, at any time, be carried, in a consistency with reason or Scripture. And the necessity of the members of a religious communion engaging in it, to this extent, must be left to their own determination. But should the members of a church, after having framed

and subscribed a covenant, attempt to impose it *by force* upon the consciences of others ; should they supplicate “ his majesty’s high commissioner, and the honourable estates of parliament, by their authority to ratify and enjoin the same, under all civil pains ;” should they declare “ that there is no other face of Kirk, nor other face of religion,” than what their covenant recognises, and procure an act of parliament ordaining magistrates, sheriffs, &c. “ to search, apprehend, and punish all contraveners ;” should they declare “ that none shall be reputed as loyal and faithful subjects to our sovereign Lord or his authority, but be punishable as rebels and gainstanders of the same, who shall not give their confession, and make their profession of the said true religion ;” and, finally, should they call upon the king to “ be careful to root out of the empire all heretics and enemies to the true worship of God, who shall be convicted by the true Kirk of God of the foresaid crimes ;” should the members of a church, under the laudable pretence of promoting the true religion, be guilty of such proceedings as these, they are stepping altogether out of their proper province ; they are employing weapons in the service of God, which are abhorrent to the spirit of christianity ; and their covenant, designed as a bond of union among the fearers of God, they are converting into an instrument of cruel oppression. It was here that the Scottish Covenanters erred. It was not in their entering into a mutual confederation for the maintenance of their religion, and the protection of their lives that their error lay ; to this they were shut up by the circumstances in which they were placed : but it was in the spirit of intolerance which characterised their proceedings, foolishly attempting to compel all, *vi et armis*, to come within the bond of their darling covenant, as if no person could be either a loyal subject or a true christian, who preferred remaining without the mysterious circle.

The bond, which the Associate Presbytery prepared and subscribed, and in which they required all the congregations under their charge to join, breathes much less of the spirit of

intolerance, than either the National Covenant, or the Solemn League and Covenant. There is indeed little or nothing in it, to which any member of a presbyterian church may not cordially assent. It was drawn up by the Presbytery “*in a suitableness to their present circumstances ;*” and they carefully avoid any allusion to civil pains and penalties being employed to enforce an agreement with their covenant. They appear to be designedly guarded on this subject ; for, while they declare it to be their duty to contend against popery, prelacy, deism, arianism, &c. on the one hand, and to promote what they call “*our covenanted conjunction and uniformity in religion,*” on the other ; yet they entrench themselves within safe ground, when they promise and swear to do this, “*by all means which are lawful and warrantable for them, according to the word of God, the approven and received standards of their church,*” &c.

In one point, the Presbytery certainly grievously erred, and that was in enacting that the *renewing of the covenants* should be *the term* of ministerial and christian communion, as if this constituted the only satisfactory evidence of a person being a genuine christian, and as if no other marks of christian character were entitled to any consideration. Into this fault they were led, from a desire to imitate, as closely as possible, the conduct of their reforming ancestors. The renovation of the covenants, so far from being *the term*, ought not to have been *a term* of communion at all ; because many good and conscientious persons were thereby subjected to the alternative either of giving their assent to statements, of the language of which they might not approve, and the truth of which they had no means of ascertaining, or of being excluded from the fellowship of the church altogether. The Presbytery, however, allowed the people a considerable latitude in exercising their judgment about this matter. It does not appear that public covenanting was rigorously enforced by them, as a term of communion ; for, thirty years after their enactment had been in existence, a writer,* who

* Mr Adam Gib.

had every opportunity of acquiring correct information on the subject, observes that, "so far as he knows, or can remember, there has been no instance of any of the people being kept back from sealing ordinances for not joining in covenanting work; while none of them have been found as is above expressed (that is, *neglecters* and *shifters* of the duty), but they have always been waited for, till willingly *offering themselves*, upon occasions of that solemn work, in their several congregations." I suppose, from this statement, that a great portion of the people must have ranked in that class, toward whom the Presbytery enjoined tenderness and lenity to be observed, on account of their "*lying open to light, and minting to come forward in the said cause.*"

The public business of the Associate Presbytery had now increased to such an extent, and, by the new settlements which had taken place amongst them, the members were removed to such distances from one another, that they found it very inconvenient to meet together in the same place so frequently as the despatch of business required; and, when they did meet, they were not able to overtake the one-half of the causes which came before them; so that they were often under the necessity of deferring from one meeting to another, the decision of important matters. They, therefore, resolved, on the 11th of October 1744, to constitute themselves into a synod, to be styled "The Associate Synod," and to consist of three presbyteries; these were the Presbyteries of Dunfermline, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. Each of these presbyteries was appointed to hold its first meeting at the places now mentioned respectively (with the exception of the presbytery of Glasgow, which was appointed to meet at Stirling), on the fourth Wednesday of November ensuing; and the first day of meeting was to be observed by all of them as a day of fasting and of religious exercises; and the whole were appointed to meet, for the first time, in the Associate Synod, at Stirling, on the first Tuesday of March 1745.*

* The Associate Synod, when it was first formed, consisted of the following ministers, and of a lay elder from each of the congregations here men-

The Associate Synod held its first meeting in the "New Church," at Stirling, at the time now mentioned, and was constituted with prayer by Mr Ebenezer Erskine; after which the Synod made choice of Mr Ralph Erskine for their moderator, and Mr John Reid, "indweller at Edinburgh," was appointed clerk. The attention of the Synod was occupied with a variety of matters which were intimately connected with the purity of discipline, and with the progress of religion. Overtures were introduced, with a view to promote uniformity in church discipline, and in privy

tioned; and they were classed in presbyteries according to the following order:—

PRESBYTERY OF DUNFERMLINE.

Messrs Ralph Erskine, Dunfermline.	Messrs Thomas Mair, Orwell.
Andrew Arrot, Dunichen.	William Campbell, Ceres.
James Thomson, Burntisland.	George Brown, Perth.
Alex. Moncrieff, Abernethy.	John Erskine, Leslie.

The following congregations, which were then vacant, were placed under the charge of this Presbytery; viz. Kirkaldy, Kinkell, Muckhart, Kinclaven, Dundee, Montrose, Ross, Murray, and Buchan; and it was farther declared, that the same Presbytery should have the superintendence of all congregations that might be formed on the north side of the Forth, with the exception of Monteath.

PRESBYTERY OF GLASGOW.

Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, Stirling.	Messrs David Horn, Cambusnethan.
James Fisher, Glasgow.	Henry Erskine, Falkirk.
David Smyton, Kilmaurs.	John M'Cara, Kilbarchan.
John Cleland, Balfron.	Andrew Black, Cumbernauld.

To this Presbytery was allotted the charge of the following vacant congregations; viz. Mearns, Kilbride, Sanquhar, and Orr in Galloway; under its superintendence also were placed those congregations which were then forming, or such as might afterward be formed, in Ireland.

PRESBYTERY OF EDINBURGH.

Messrs James Mair, Linton.	Messrs James Scot, Gateshaw.
William Hutton, Stow.	John Whyte, Dunse.
Adam Gib, Edinburgh.	George Murray, Annandale.
Andrew Clarkson, Linlithgow.	Robt. Archibald, Haddington.
Patrick Matthew, Midholm.	Thos. Sommerville, Newcastle.

The following vacant congregations were declared to belong to this Presbytery; viz. Dalkeith, Stichel, Jedburgh, and London, together with all that might afterward be formed on the English side of the Tweed.

censures, recommending also the practice of presbyterial exercises to the different presbyteries, and urging upon the Synod the framing of proper regulations for conducting parochial visitations. It was recommended to all the congregations to make public collections to raise a fund for support of the students; and to guard against the introduction of unqualified persons into the office of the ministry, the committee of overtures brought in a motion, that the Synod should enact certain regulations, with a view to prevent injurious consequences arising from the practice of men leaving their trades, and those callings in which providence had placed them, and going to school, in order to their being afterward admitted to the study of divinity. The Synod, however, was obliged to delay the consideration of this, and of some other matters, till a future meeting.

Anxious to contribute their aid in diffusing the light of the gospel throughout benighted Ireland, Mr John M'Cara, minister at Kilbarchan, and Mr Isaac Paton, probationer, were appointed to labour for several weeks in the northern parts of that island. The result of this mission was, that Mr Paton received a call from the Seceders in and around Temple Patrick; and, in the following year, was ordained among them as their pastor. The presbytery of Dunfermline having called the attention of the Synod to the state of the congregation of Abbotshall, which had become vacant by the secession of Mr Nairn from the Presbytery, the Synod resolved that, before taking any steps toward the settlement of that congregation, a process should be commenced against Mr Nairn, on the grounds stated in the act of the Associate Presbytery, passed at Edinburgh, on the 3d January 1743; and Messrs Alexander Moncrieff, Thomas Mair, James Fisher, and Adam Gib, were appointed a committee to prepare the draft of a libel, to be submitted to the consideration of the Synod, at their next meeting, that it might afterwards be put into the hands of Mr Nairn. The committee executed their task, and the draft of a libel was laid before the Synod, at a subsequent meeting; but a temporary inter-

ruption was given to this business, by the controversy carried on respecting the burgess oath ; and it was not until the separation which this controversy occasioned, had taken place, that the process was resumed, and brought to an issue by the Antiburgher Associate Synod.

The meetings of the Synod, during the year 1745, were frequent. It met no fewer than four times in the course of nine months, viz. at Stirling, in March, and September, and November ; and at Edinburgh in May ; and, during the following year, it met three times. That unhappy controversy had already commenced, which was ere long to rend asunder the Secession Church ; and, as no small portion of the Synod's time, at each meeting, was spent in angry disputings upon the question of the burgess oath, this rendered it necessary that more frequent meetings should be held, than would otherwise have been required for the ordinary despatch of business. The narrative of this controversy shall be reserved till the following chapter, that my readers may be presented with a connected view of its origin, progress, and disastrous issue.

During the progress of these discussions, the Synod was actively engaged in diffusing the knowledge of the gospel as extensively as its limited means would permit. Whatever diversity of opinion might exist amongst the members on other points, here they all most harmoniously agreed. Nor were their efforts confined to the destitute districts of Scotland ; their brethren in England and Ireland were not overlooked by them, in their labours of love. In answer to repeated and urgent applications from the friends of the Secession in London, the Synod, at its meeting in April 1746, appointed Messrs Adam Gib and William Mair, to preach for several weeks during the summer, in the British metropolis ; and Mr John Potts, probationer, was appointed to succeed them ; and, at the meeting of September, in the same year, Messrs John Swanston and George Murray were sent to preach at Belfast and Markethill, in the north of Ireland ; and a recommendation was given to the Glasgow pre-

bytery that they should undertake farther missions to the same district.

The Rebellion of 1745, furnished the Seceders with an excellent opportunity of solving the problem, whether it is possible for persons to renounce the communion of a national church, and at the same time continue loyal subjects. Their patriotic conduct during this season of danger and alarm, afforded an admirable refutation of the ungenerous charges preferred against them by their enemies, that they were disaffected to government. Both ministers and people vied with one another in giving proofs of attachment to the reigning family. They were too sensible of the advantages which they enjoyed under the mild sway of the princes of the House of Brunswick, to bid God-speed to any attempt (by whomsoever made), to drive them from the throne. They felt grateful for the protection which the Hanoverian dynasty afforded them, in the possession of their privileges; and they showed their gratitude, by stepping forward, in the hour of their country's peril, and risking life and property in its defence.

When the Synod met at Stirling, in the month of September 1745, immediately after the defeat of the king's troops, by the Highlanders, in the battle of Prestonpans, they set apart a portion of their time for solemn prayer to God, on account of the threatening aspect of public affairs; and, before they separated, they appointed a day to be observed by all the congregations under their inspection, in humbling themselves before God, and in earnest supplication to the Divine Being, that he would be pleased to avert the tokens of his displeasure. In their address to the people, they stated what were the views which, as a Synod, they entertained of the wicked attempt that was making to subvert the constitution, and to restore the Stuart family to the throne: for, amongst other reasons which they assign for calling upon congregations to engage in these solemn exercises, they mention the following:—"That the Lord, in his righteous displeasure, hath now permitted the whole protestant in-

terest in these lands, and all the valuable liberties thereof, to be actually struck at, and awfully shaken, by the son of a popish pretender, at the head of a popish and malignant party in this land. Moreover, not only has the Lord, in prosecution of his controversy, permitted this party to prevail through a great part of the kingdom, and over our army, to the effusion of blood, insomuch that the generation of papists and malignants among us, are lifting up their heads, and exalting themselves proudly over us; but also the generality appear insensible and regardless of the Lord's controversy, together with the grounds thereof, and to have lost sight and sense of our valuable liberties and privileges, civil and sacred, so that many are disposed to promote the present invasion and rebellion; others are disposed to give way thereunto; and the most are little affected therewith before the Lord, and little or no way disposed to turn unto the Lord, and wrestle with him, that he may turn away from the fierceness of his anger, and interpose, in his great and gracious sovereignty, for blasting the designs, progress, and expectations of our enemies, and the enemies of the kingdom of Christ, in these lands."

At the next meeting of Synod (April 1746), an overture was introduced, with a view to determine the mode in which the Seceders should take up arms. In this overture, the principle was distinctly recognized, of its being their duty to appear in support of the common cause, as members of the body politic, and as being "in civil connexion with, and subjection to, our sovereign king George." At the same time, it was declared, that, in associating together in a military capacity, they should not be incorporated along with those who refused to testify against the corruptions in church and state, but should be enrolled as a separate body of men. This overture, after being discussed, was sent down to presbyteries, that they might consider it, and be prepared to report concerning the propriety of adopting it at a future meeting. The speedy suppression of the Rebellion, however, rendered it unnecessary that the Synod should give any formal judg-

ment upon this point. The obvious intention of those who brought forward and supported this motion, was, that the Seceders, in taking up arms to oppose the "antichristian party" (so the rebels were termed), should be assimilated as closely as possible to the covenanters of former times. Hence it was proposed that, should a militia regiment of Seceders be formed, they should be commanded by officers of their own choosing; should be permitted to choose a minister to dispense religious ordinances among them; should be furnished with arms and money, according to act of Parliament; should be dismissed at the end of six months, or after the rebellion was suppressed; and, finally, that they should be exempted from taking the usual military oath.*

Before the subject of taking up arms was discussed in the Synod, corps of volunteers had already been formed by some of the Secession congregations.

When General Hawley was at Edinburgh, making preparations for opposing the rebel army, three hundred Seceders, connected with the congregation of Edinburgh and neighbourhood, applied to the Lord Provost to be allowed to take part in defence of the city. They were furnished with arms and ammunition from the Castle; they hired a serjeant to teach them the military exercise, and marched under colours bearing the following inscription:—"For religion, the covenants, king, and kingdoms." On the night when the rebels were admitted into the city, this band stood to their post in the Infirmary Yard, and did not carry back their arms to the Castle, till they were informed that all others in the city had already done so.†

During the period that the rebels kept possession of Edinburgh, Mr Gib assembled his congregation for public worship at Dreghorn, near Colinton, about three miles west of the city. On the first Sabbath of their assembling at this

* See Mr E. Erskine's Letter to the Marchioness of Lothian, inserted in Dr Fraser's Memoir of him, p. 442.

† Struther's History of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 302. Letter from Adam Gib, in the Scots Mag. vol. xxvii. p. 230.

place, Mr Gib addressed his people in the following terms:—
 “ The place where we are met should be putting us in mind of what occasions our removal from our ordinary place of meeting, that we may bring a concern of these things before God. And here I would notice unto you, that our not assembling in our ordinary place, appears warranted in point of necessity, and in point of duty. 1. In point of necessity: That this congregation may, as far as possible, attain composure in worship, as therein we have God, not man to deal with. 2. In point of duty: That thus we may give an open testimony, proof, and document, that we are resolved, through the Lord’s grace, to come to no terms with the enemy that has power in the city, but to look on them as enemies, showing ourselves to be none of their confederacy. In our public capacity, it is fit that we make even a voluntary removal from the place where they are, as from the seat of robbers, showing ourselves resolved that their seat shall not be ours.”

After the rebel army marched south to England, Mr Gib and his congregation returned to their usual place of worship, when Mr Gib made the following address to his people:—“ We have reason to acknowledge providential kindness, in that, when removed from this place, we have yet been allowed to meet within our own bounds, where we had access to something of that composure without which worshipping assemblies are vain: And our very meetings elsewhere, during the time that the antichristian and malignant party now in arms had their seat here, have been an open and necessary testimony against them, and of our purposing no confederacy with them, nor putting any confidence in them.”*

One of the stations where the rebels kept a principal guard, was Colinton, in the immediate vicinity of which Mr Gib preached for five successive Sabbaths, in the open air. On these occasions, some of the rebel guard were ordinarily seen standing in the outskirts of the congregation, listening

* Gib’s Letter in the Scots Mag. vol. xxvii.

to his prayers and discourses. He had the courage to express, in their presence, his abhorrence of the rebellion, and a hope that it would be brought to a speedy termination. He presented also public prayers in their hearing, each Sabbath, for the safety of the reigning sovereign king George, for the support of his government, for a blessing on his family, and for the preservation of the protestant succession in that family. He prayed also, at the same time, for the suppression of the rebellion, characterising it as "an unnatural and antichristian rebellion, headed by a popish pretender." On one of these Sabbaths, while some of the rebels were standing before him, he read an act of the Associate Synod for a solemn fast, to be observed on the following Tuesday, which act was mainly levelled against the rebellion, with a call to pray for the king and against the rebellion, in such express terms as those already mentioned. During the reading of the act, the rebels showed great displeasure, and threatened, in the hearing of some of the people, to prevent the observance of the fast; but though they then attended, they were restrained from using any violence.*

When intelligence was received that the rebel army were on their return from England, and when apprehensions were entertained of their paying another visit to the Scottish metropolis, the Edinburgh Seceders were called upon by the sheriff again to take part in defence of the city. This call they cheerfully obeyed. The post assigned them was the College-Yard, which post (says Mr Gib), they kept, "learning their exercise, all at their own expense, till a sufficient body of the military arrived."†

The Glasgow Seceders were not behind their brethren in Edinburgh, in manifesting their attachment to their sovereign at the present crisis. They asked and obtained arms from the government. They readily obeyed a call that was given them, to attend the army at Falkirk, and some of them lost their lives in the disastrous battle that was fought in

* Gib's Letter in the Scots Mag. vol. xxvii.

† Ibid.

that neighbourhood. In several districts of the country, the congregations met for the purpose of drilling, that they might be the better prepared for co-operating with regular troops, whenever their services might be required.

This spirit of loyalty, on the part of the people, was greatly encouraged both by the exhortations and by the example of their ministers. By the active measures which the Secession ministers adopted, in support of the royal cause, they attracted the notice, and called forth the approbation of persons occupying high official situations, while they rendered themselves peculiarly obnoxious to the rebel party. On the evening after the battle of Falkirk, a search was made for Mr Gib in that town by the rebels, because, a few hours before the battle was fought, he had been instrumental in getting a person who had just come from the rebel camp, apprehended and carried before General Hawley, to be examined for intelligence.* Mr Moncrieff of Abernethy suffered the spoliation of his property, by the rebels, because he refused to pay cess when demanded by their leader. He had also his son and heir taken from him, and kept as a prisoner at Perth, with a threat that he would be put to death should any attempt be made at rescue.†

At this critical period, Mr Ebenezer Erskine stood conspicuously forward in support of the righteous cause. When the rebellion broke out, and when it was anticipated that an attack would be made upon Stirling, he exerted himself in raising several companies to defend the town; and it was mainly owing to the influence which he possessed, that a band of six hundred volunteers was raised, who were furnished with arms and accoutrements from the castle. It is said that he acted as captain of one of the volunteer companies. One night, when it was expected that an attack would be made upon the town, he appeared in military costume, in the guard-room, resolved to share the dangers of the defence. Some of those who were present expressed their surprise at

* Gib's Letter in the Scots Mag. vol. xxvii.

† Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 250.

seeing him, and urged him to go home to his prayers, as being more suitable to his profession. His reply was, "I am determined to take the hazard of the night along with you, for the present crisis requires the arms as well as the prayers of all good subjects." When Stirling was taken possession of by the rebels, Mr Erskine withdrew from the town, not more from prudential considerations, connected with his safety, than that he might not have the appearance of yielding submission to the usurped authority of Charles. For several Sabbaths he preached to his people in the wood of Tillibody, a few miles to the north of Stirling.

The Marquis of Lothian, hearing that it was the intention of the Seceders to raise a regiment of militia for the defence of the country, wrote the following letter to Mr Ebenezer Erskine, making an offer of the services of his son, Lord Robert Ker, as colonel of the Secession regiment:—

"London, January 25, 1745-6.

"REV. SIR,—Being informed that many of his Majesty's well affected subjects (with whom you have great interest), zealous for the defence of our present happy government and invaluable interests, now attacked by France, Spain, the Pope, and a popish pretender, have offered to take arms and serve the King, upon condition of being allowed to choose their own officers; I therefore take the liberty to offer my son, Lord Robert Ker, who is ambitious to serve as their colonel, if they do him and my family the honour to prefer him. It would not be decent for me to give his character, but am persuaded he would behave and act so as to gain their good opinion. I beg to obtain your forgiveness for this trouble, and to be esteemed, Sir, your most obedient and most humble servant,

"LOTHIAN.

"The Duke is soon to be with you, and it will be very proper that you address him; for which end, my son, if you desire, shall attend you."

To this communication Mr Erskine gave the following reply:—

"Stirling, February 8, 1746.

"MY LORD,—I had the honour of your Lordship's (letter) of the 25th of January, Sabbath last, when I returned from my exile through

the Highland (bands) which had infested this place for about twenty days. Thanks be to God who made the very name and arms of his Royal Highness, the Duke of Cumberland, such a terror to them, that they left the place with such precipitance, that as they blew up their magazine in the church of St Ninians, lest it should fall into the hands of our army, so they left a great deal of their baggage for them. I had wrote your Lordship sooner, had it not been for that confusion the place was in for some days, while the Duke and his army were passing.

“In consequence of your Lordship’s letter, I did myself the honour of waiting upon your son, Lord Robert, on Monday last, when he was in this place with the army, and told him of what motion was made to me by your Lordship and my Lady Marchioness. He told me he had some knowledge of that affair; but in regard of the sudden flight of the enemy, and that there was now a great probability that the Rebellion might be extinguished by the regular troops under the command of his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland, he did not think there would be any occasion for the Seceders to regiment themselves at present. However, as I told himself, if there were any occasion for the Seceders to appear in arms in defence of his Majesty’s person, and government, and family, and the liberty we enjoy under his protection, I know of none that would be more acceptable to them as a leader or colonel than Lord Robert, both upon account of his own presumptive merit, of which I had good information from General Blackeney and others, as also on account of that noble family of Lothian he is come of, which hath both formerly and of late made such appearances for the Protestant interest and our reformation-work in Scotland. And in this, your noble family and we who are Seceders from the Established Church, do happily agree; for our Secession from the present judicatories goes purely and only upon this very ground, that we think they have, in many particulars, departed from the covenanted doctrine, discipline, and government of the reformation Church of Scotland.—I am, my Lord, your Lordship’s most humble and most obedient servant,

“EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

The activity and zeal which Mr Erskine displayed in the cause of his sovereign, called forth the following letter of thanks, which was addressed to him by command of the Duke of Cumberland :—

“*Falkirk, February 1, 1745-6.*

“SIR,—His Royal Highness has ordered me to tell you, that he is

much obliged to you for your intelligence, and for the zeal you show in his Majesty's service. With regard to the information contained in your letter, our advices since received make it unnecessary to do any thing upon it. But his Royal Highness is not the less sensible of your good intention.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

“ H. CONWAY,

“ Aide-de-Camp to H. R. H.”*

In addition to the above, I shall here insert two letters addressed by the Marchioness of Lothian to Mr Gib of Edinburgh, which will illustrate still further the excellent spirit displayed by the Seceders during the period of the rebellion :—

“ *Newbattle, January 20, 1746.*

“ REV. SIR,—The noble stand which the people of your profession have made for the religion and liberties of the country, must endear them to all true Christians, and to the countenance of those who are able to forward and support them in their valuable designs.

“ Their conduct must make every one of revolution principles proud of showing them regard. My Lord must value them on that head ; and it gave me no small pleasure when I heard that, as they wanted a colonel or leader, some of them had pointed at my son Lord Robert. I could not omit, therefore, signifying to you, that whatever service my Lord Marquis or my son can do to them, they will most cheerfully undertake. Only as there has been an offer made my son by some of the country militia, I could wish that he knew how far he had in his power to show his respect to you in the first place ; and so far as you can bring this matter to an issue, it shall be taken as a piece of respect done this family, which we shall not be unmindful to acknowledge. Your answer as soon as possible will oblige, Rev. Sir, your most humble servant,

“ M. LOTHIAN.”

Mr Gib having written, in reply to the above, received the following answer from the Marchioness :—

“ *Newbattle, February 5, 1745-6.*

“ SIR,—Give me leave to return you hearty thanks for your kind and affectionate letter of January 21st, and to assure you that it will

* This and the two preceding letters have been extracted from Dr Fraser's Life of Mr Ebenezer Erskine.

yield (the) greatest pleasure to this family to deserve the honour you do us. And as it would be a great pity your people and followers did not take the opportunity of the Duke's being in our country to testify in a proper way your warm zeal for the cause of religion and liberty, which yet will be but doing yourselves justice, I shall be glad if the enclosed scroll contains any hints to your liking. And if you shall judge it proper to have any such deed made out, my son Lord Robert will reckon it his honour to have it and any commissioners you send, introduced by proper hands to his Royal Highness.

"I have wrote Mr Ebenezer Erskine of this date, and if you'll be so good (as) to communicate this letter to Mr Fisher, and any others you think proper, it will be vastly obliging to, Sir, your very humble servant,

"M. LOTHIAN."

The narrative now given of the loyal part which those in the communion of the Secession acted, during the troublesome period of 1745-6, shows how grievously they have been slandered, in having the charge of disaffection preferred against them. Never was there a class of men, in reference to whom, viewed collectively, such a charge has been more unfounded. The ministers, instead of being, what some have been pleased to term them, "factious demagogues," were men of honourable feeling, as well as religious principle; alike faithful to their God and to their king. Their loyalty, too, was the more unquestionable, that it was *unbought*. It was not called forth by court favours previously received, nor was it displayed in expectation of its being speedily rewarded by the bestowal of some lucrative benefice. It was, in them, the dictate of a conscience enlightened by the word of God; and the manifestation of it was the natural result of that love of civil and religious freedom, for which they were eminently distinguished. With regard, again, to the people, the zeal which they displayed, in coming cheerfully forward to the defence of the government, when it was in danger of being overturned, was alike creditable to their intelligence and their piety. The same religious principle, which led them to withdraw from the communion of a church, in which they could no longer conscientiously re-

main, prompted them to rally round the throne of their sovereign, when it was shaken by the spirit of rebellion. Their abhorrence of despotism and their love of freedom appeared pre-eminent in both cases. The lessons which they practised on this subject, they had learned from their Bible ; and, next to the glory of God, the temporal and spiritual welfare of their fellow men was the object which they were most anxious to promote.

Mr Gib, in the second volume of his "Display,"* bears the following testimony to the loyalty of the Seceders:—
" Then, as now, the Seceders were spread through all the Lowlands of Scotland ; from Dunkeld to Cheviot, from St Andrews to Ayr: And in the counties of Angus, Mearns, Banff, Elgin, Nairn, and Ross. Yet not one of them in all Scotland, even in places where the rebels had the greatest power and influence, could ever be got to join, or to show any favour to the designs of that party. All of them, men and women, took all opportunities to manifest their abhorrence of the Rebellion."

This statement is overcharged, and claims for the Seceders more than the truth of history warrants. That in a body so widely extended as the Secession then was, no individuals should be found who were disposed to befriend the cause of the exiled family, is more than what could reasonably have been expected. There were instances, though they were few in number, of such Jacobitical leanings among the Seceders. But those persons who gave any countenance to the rebel party, were regarded as offenders by the church courts, and were dealt with accordingly. Two members of the congregation of Abernethy were appointed, by the presbytery of Dunfermline, to be censured for sinful compliance with the rebels ; and a member of the congregation of Stirling received a solemn rebuke, in presence of the session, for a similar offence. Exceptions, it is said, confirm the general rule : And from these instances now mentioned, two inferences are deducible ; first, that the church courts of the Se-

* P. 248.

cession showed their abhorrence of the rebellion, not merely by warning their people against it, but by subjecting to ecclesiastical discipline those who gave it any countenance ; and, secondly, that the people belonging to the Secession, viewed as a whole, were most devoted in their attachment to the reigning family, and continued firm in their allegiance to government, seeing that in two of the largest congregations connected with the association,—and these situated in the very centre of the rebels' operations,—only *three* individuals were found against whom the charge of compliance with the “ antichristian party ” could be substantiated.

CHAPTER VI.

Burgess Oath controversy. Reasons why it ought not to be silently passed over. Overture concerning the burgess oath. Religious clause in the burgess oath. Different opinions concerning it. Keen debates in the Synod. Mr Adam Gib's opinion of the religious clause. Mr Archibald Hall's opinion. Motion made concerning the religious clause. Counter-motion for delay. Counter-motion carried. Mr Gib dissents. Joined by Messrs Moncrieff and Campbell. Meeting of Synod in September 1745. A motion for delay carried. A meeting of Synod in November. The business again delayed. Meeting of Synod in April 1746. Full attendance of ministers and elders. Several healing measures proposed. All of them rejected. Motion *against* the religious clause. Motion carried. Mr Ralph Erskine and several others protest. Meeting of Synod in September. Motion concerning making the former decision a term of communion. Protest against the putting of this motion. Stormy debates. A motion for delay carried. Sixteen members protest. Mr Ebenezer Erskine's declaration. Meeting of Synod in April 1747. A great interest excited. Discussions concerning the statement of the vote. Mr Gib's protest. A vote stated concerning the decision of Synod in April 1746. Mr Moncrieff's protestation. The question concerning said decision put to the vote. Carried in the affirmative. Mr Thomas Mair's declaration. Disruption of the Synod. A number of the brethren meet in Mr Gib's house. Claim the authority of the Associate Synod. Resolutions adopted by them. Condemnatory acts. Questions added to the formula. Burgher and Antiburgher designations. Proceedings of the Burgher brethren. Letter to Mr Thomas Mair and Mr Gib. Answers of these brethren. Burgher Synod meets at Dunfermline. Act of Nullity passed by them. Applications to them for sermon. *Pro re nata* meeting at Falkirk. Letter sent to

the Antiburgher brethren. Meeting of the Antiburgher Synod. Resolves to libel the Burgher brethren. Articles of the libel. Mr Hutton appears before the Synod. Reads a paper. Is deposed. Sentence of deposition and excommunication pronounced upon all the Burgher brethren. Privy censures in the Antiburgher Synod. Reflections on the breach.

THERE may be a diversity of opinion, among the friends of the Secession, about the propriety of giving a place in this narrative to those disputes, respecting the burgess oath, which terminated in a disruption of the Synod. Some may be inclined to think, that the writer of these pages would have acted a much more filial part toward his parent-church if, instead of Ham-like, exposing her sin and her nakedness to his brethren, he had gone backward, with reverential step, and thrown the mantle of oblivion over that part of her conduct, which exhibits almost the only blot on her history. With those who cherish such an amiable feeling as this the author cordially sympathises, though he thinks it would be indulging it to a morbid excess, were he to permit it to arrest the progress of his pen in detailing the steps of a controversy, which, while it lasted, possessed an all-absorbing interest within the circle of the combatants; and which, though productive of many painful consequences, yet, by the over-ruling providence of God, has tended greatly to the enlargement of the Secession Church, and to the more extensive diffusion of the gospel; inasmuch as it originated two rival Synods entertaining similar views of doctrine, discipline, and worship, and equally distinguished for their zeal and activity in promoting pure and undefiled religion. He is aware that in the present circumstances of the Secession Church, after a re-union betwixt these two Synods has been so recently and so happily accomplished, the ground he is about to occupy, in this chapter, is tender, and requires to be delicately trodden upon. He shall, therefore, apply himself to this part of his narrative with more than ordinary caution; and shall sedulously guard against permitting a single

sentence to drop from his pen which shall either indicate the existence of partisanship in himself, or excite an angry feeling in the bosom of any of his brethren. His object shall be, carefully to examine and compare the statements of conflicting writers, that he may thus arrive at a proper knowledge of the facts : these facts he shall lay before his readers, without colouring and without comment ; and instead of constituting himself a judge, and pronouncing a sentence upon either the one party or the other, he shall commit this delicate work into the hands of his readers, and shall leave it to them to approve or to censure, according as the judgment of each may direct. The author is greatly encouraged to proceed in this part of his work by the confidence which he reposes in the intelligence and in the candour of his brethren. To both of these qualities he makes his appeal in the present instance. He safely trusts their good sense with the decision of the question, whether it would have been proper, in such a narrative as the present, to omit taking any notice of the burgess oath controversy, merely on account of the unpleasant recollections which it is fitted to recal ; and he relies upon their candour, for giving him full credit for the statement which he makes, when he says, that, in the details which he has presented on this subject, he has made it his anxious study, so far as he consistently could, to consult the feelings of all parties concerned. It is so far fortunate, that the controversy, to which the attention of the reader is about to be directed, possesses now no practical interest, and in all probability never shall ; and it may, therefore, be safely consigned to the page of history, without any dread of its again rousing into a flame the angry passions of men. It has long ceased to agitate the churches. Those good men who, when living, attached so much importance to it, have long ago seen “ eye to eye ” in that “ better country,” where the voice of discord is for ever hushed ; and the feelings, with which we now look back upon the strife, are similar to those which we experience when gazing upon some spot in nature over which we are told a dreadful hurricane

once swept, the effects of which have completely passed away, and where nothing now is to be seen but peace and verdure.

At the first meeting of the Associate Synod at Stirling, in March 1745, an overture was transmitted from the presbytery of Dunfermline, to the following effect:—"That the Synod take under their consideration, whether or not the burgess oath be agreeable to the word of God, and to the received principles of this church founded thereupon; and particularly to those contained in the Judicial Act and Testimony emitted by the Associate Presbytery, in the act relating to Mr Nairn's affair, and in the act concerning the renovation of our covenants." An overture was also transmitted from the presbytery of Edinburgh:—"For the Synod to consider upon, and endeavour to remove any public bars that may be presently found in the way of due progress in covenanting work." The latter of these overtures was subsequently withdrawn, and it was agreed that the former should be considered at a meeting, which was appointed to be held in the month of May for the discussion of this and some other matters.

When the Synod met in May, they entered upon the consideration of this overture at a private sederunt, and the *religious clause* contained in certain burgess oaths,* became the grand topic in dispute. The clause ran in the following terms:—"Here I protest before God, and your Lordships, that I profess, and allow with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof: I shall abide thereat, and defend the same to my life's end; renouncing the Roman religion called papistry." The question,—What is meant by the "*true religion presently professed within this realm*," &c. gave rise to long and keen discussion. One party in the Synod interpreted these words to be of similar import with the true religion *as* presently professed and authorised, &c.—and maintained that swear-

* This clause was contained in the oath imposed upon burgesses in the towns of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth.

ing this part of the oath was equivalent to giving a solemn approbation of those corruptions that prevailed in the Established Church, and against which the Secession had publicly testified. Another party maintained that this clause of the oath bound the individual, who swore it, to approve of *the true religion itself, as that which was settled and professed* in this realm, but did not bind him to approve of *the manner* in which it might be settled and professed; and that, therefore, it did not require of him any approbation of the prevailing corruptions in either church or state.

To give a detailed account of the arguments which the contending parties advanced, in support of the opposite views, which they maintained on this question, would be neither profitable nor interesting. Much ingenuity, as well as much heat, was displayed on both sides. Connected with the main question, a number of collateral ones was introduced, and all of them agitated with the same keenness; and thus the strife, which at first had comparatively but a small beginning, gradually swelled into a magnitude, altogether disproportionate to its merits, and much greater than either friend or foe could have anticipated. Instead of embodying in language of my own the sentiments which were expressed in the course of the controversy, I shall, for the sake of avoiding even the appearance of partiality, give an extract from a respectable writer on each side of the question, which will place before my readers the particular views held, by both parties in the Synod, respecting the religious clause of the burgess oath.

“A plain case,” says Mr Gib,* “is rather obscured by laborious reasoning in its behalf; and it speaks best for itself. Explication, instead of argumentation, is all that the present case properly requires: And, for this, the following notes may suffice:—

“First, the subject of the oath, in the clause referred to, is called the *true religion*; a name of no certain or fixed sense; but as defined by the words following: According to

* Display, Vol. II. p. 25.

which, the swearer means it of what is professed and authorised in this realm, under the character of the *true* religion ; as in general the *Protestant* religion, opposed to the Roman religion called *Papistry*.

“ Secondly, the oath is manifestly of a *current* nature ; still respecting the true religion, under the character of being *presently* professed and authorised : And so the meaning of it has never any relation to the past, but always to the present state of matters, in the professing and authorising of the true religion ; continually changing, just according to all the changes which take place in that professing and authorising.

“ Thirdly, it is therefore obvious at first view, in what manner the oath of the religious clause ‘ comes necessarily in this period to be used and applied :’ That it is necessarily used about and applied unto the true religion, just according to the professing and authorising of it in this period, among the hands of the present national, or Established Church of Scotland.

“ Fourthly, the swearer acknowledges a present professing of the true religion in the Established Church ; and, at the same time, solemnly asserts a present professing of it on his own part. But these *two* *professings* cannot, with any ingenuity, be taken for *two different ways of professing*. The professing in the Established Church, and the swearers’ professing, must be taken for one and the same way of professing the true religion : So that the swearer must be understood, according to the terms and nature of the oath, to take up with the professing of it in the Established Church, as the pattern of his professing it. The oath must therefore mean the swearers’ satisfaction, with the present public state of true religion, as to that professing and authorising of it which is among the hands of the present Established Church : So far as to mean, that he sees no reason or warrant for a different way of professing the true religion, in a separate communion from her ; no such defections and corruptions, in the present professing and authorising of it among her hands, as to require or warrant a Secession from her, unto a professing of it in the way

of a public testimony against these defections and corruptions. It is, therefore, most evidently an oath of immediate and full communion with the present Established Church : Bearing the swearer's engagement to abide at and defend the true religion, in that communion, to his life's end. Wherefore,

“ Fifthly, the oath of the religious clause doth materially and plainly amount unto a solemn *abjuration* of the whole Secession Testimony ; or of the whole present Testimony for religion and reformation, as maintained by the Associate Synod and those under their inspection, and avouched in the bond for renewing our solemn covenants : So that, to swear this oath of the Bond, and also the oath of the religious clause in burgess oaths ; would be, upon the matter, to *avouch* and *abjure*, promiscuously, the whole Testimony among their hands.”

The Rev. Archibald Hall, vindicating the view held by that party in the Synod who were favourable to the disputed religious clause, says ;* “ The original design of that clause is manifest from the tenor of the clause itself, viz. *to exclude papists from becoming burgesses*. Therefore, every burgess in Edinburgh, Perth, and Glasgow, must swear, ‘ That he renounces the Roman religion called papistry.’ Dr Doddridge has very well observed, ‘ That if any man's religion necessarily subject him to the obedience of a foreign prince, the government under which he is born and protected, has a right, by the grand law of self preservation, to insist on some more than ordinary security for his good behaviour in such circumstances. And this is evidently the case of the papists among us. They are under such obligations in conscience to obey the Pope, and to submit themselves to whatsoever prince he shall see fit to establish here, that they are at best but very precarious subjects to a protestant monarch :’ (*Sermon on the absurdity and iniquity of persecution for conscience sake.*) Therefore (continues Mr Hall), to exclude papists from burgess-ships, is no persecution for conscience' sake, but a prudent step of sound policy. The religious clause of the

* Impartial Survey, p. 27.

burgess oaths in the burghs foresaid does exclude them: and such an oath may be very safely required and taken.

“ Secondly, the oath is adapted to serve another purpose too, and that is to satisfy the *imposer* what the religious sentiments of the *swearer* really are. The swearer upon this head declares, that *he professes and allows with his heart the true religion*. Should the imposer reply, ‘ This is a vague account of your faith: every body will call his own sentiments *the true religion*.’ The swearer answers, ‘ *The true religion which I allow with my heart, is presently professed in this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof*.’ If the imposer should still insist, ‘ Then I suppose you have carefully examined all the complex circumstances of the profession and settlement of religion, and particularly the acts of parliament at and since the Revolution, authorising religion; and upon a perusal of them, you approve of the whole; and that this is the meaning of your present oath.’ If the swearer should answer, ‘ *Sir, I only profess and allow with my heart the true religion presently professed in this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof*,’ I am persuaded every sensible man would think the imposer’s folly justly reprov’d, and sufficiently exposed, by this short reply; *compare* John xxi. 21—23.

“ Barely to suppose an imposer could be so weak, is a dishonour to any of these famous burghs, as it insinuates what I am convinced they will never be guilty of, namely, that *they intrust their affairs in the hands of fools*. But if the case should be realized, the bare repetition of the words of the oath must be a full confutation of the imposer’s ignorance, and demonstrate that he exceeded his province in *forcing a sense so foreign and unnatural* upon the oath. If the swearer should think proper to add, ‘ I am satisfied that the true religion is contained in the word of God, and exemplified in the Westminster Confession of Faith in the main heads of it; and I know this is publicly professed, and legally authorised in Scotland, though I never examined the act of parliament on the head, to form any judgment about

it one way or other : But I am sorry, Sir, to see so much practical contempt of that system manifested by many individuals, and even by the judicatures of the Established Church. I allow with my heart *the system professed and authorised by law*, as it is defined in her standards ; but I lament and abhor her degenerate proceedings.' I appeal to common sense, whether the imposer could reject a person offering to swear the burgess-oath in this sense : and I further appeal to the same venerable bar to decide whether the imposer or the swearer was the most sensible and faithful commentator. Could her virgin voice be heard amid so much art and violence as have disgraced this controversy, she would give a verdict highly mortifying to the imposer."

Such were the views held respecting the religious clause of the burgess-oath by the two conflicting parties in the Synod. After several sederunts had been spent at the *pro re nata* meeting in May in debating the question, it was proposed that the following motion should be put, as comprehending both sides of the debate, viz. " Whether the article concerning religion, in some burgess-oaths, implies an approbation of the state of religion as authorised by the laws of the land that are in force, particularly the revolution settlement of religion confirmed by the union, and no more extensive testimony to the settlement and profession of religion than said is ? Or, is it to be understood of the reformation that took place before the year 1638, and in general of the true religion, which is invariably the same in every period in opposition to popery and all false religion ?" Some of the members opposed the putting of this motion, and moved that the Synod should delay giving any decision on the question till a subsequent meeting. This latter motion being put to the vote, was carried. Mr Gib entered a dissent, in which he was joined by Messrs Moncrieff and Campbell.

The Synod met again in September 1745, when the consideration of this subject was resumed. Two sederunts were mostly spent in debating the question, " Whether the Synod should continue to sit next week, and proceed in the affair of

the burgess-oath, or delay it till a *pro re nata* meeting in November?" It carried by a majority, *Delay*, against which decision Mr Moncrieff protested; and his protest was adhered to by Messrs Gib, Clarkson, Brown, Campbell, and Thomas Mair.

In the month of November, the Synod sat for nearly two weeks, the greater part of which time was spent in reasoning upon this subject, when those who were anxious for a decision at last proposed that the following question should be put to a vote, viz. "Whether or not it be, in the present circumstances, agreeable to the word of God, and our received principles, particularly to the principles adopted by this Synod in their act and testimony, and in their act for renewing our covenants (National and Solemn League), especially for those in accession to this Synod, and holding the same testimony with them, to swear the religious clause in some burgess-oaths?" This question was met by a motion for delay, which motion being carried, Messrs Moncrieff, Gib, and Campbell, renewed their former protest.

At the next ordinary meeting of the Synod in April 1746, there was a full attendance both of ministers and elders, there being no fewer than thirty-seven members present; and the all-engrossing question of the burgess-oath was the subject of long and repeated debates. With the view of preventing, what some dreaded might be the consequence of coming to a decision on the question, viz. a rupture, several overtures of a healing nature were proposed and discussed, but without any good effect. One of these overtures was, "That the first clause of some burgess-oaths might, for the sake of peace, be explained according to the original and obvious meaning and intent of the words themselves, in such a sense as might be adapted to the present testimony, especially as magistrates of burghs are the original framers and administrators of the said oath." Another overture was, for "a mutual forbearance of one another in the present question, as being one of these things which was never matter of testimony in the Church of Scotland, and whereunto we never had attained."

A third overture proposed, "That for the sake of peace, and to prevent different practices, any under our inspection who are to enter burgesses, be advised to take the burgess-oath without the foresaid first clause, till the members of the Synod come to see more clearly, eye to eye, in this matter." While a fourth party suggested an overture for "a *new* religious clause to be introduced into the burgess-oaths; and that Seceders, when occasion offered, should insist for having the oath administered to them with the new clause, or otherwise should refuse it altogether."

To all of these proposals, objections were urged by one or other of the parties; and the whole, of course, fell to the ground. On the 9th of April, after the above overtures had been discussed and laid aside, it was agreed that at the next sederunt a state of the question should be proposed for bringing the matter to a decision. Accordingly, when the Synod met in the evening of the same day, the following motion was proposed:—"The Synod find, that a swearing the religious clause of some burgess-oaths by any under their inspection, as the said clause comes necessarily in this period to be used and applied, does not agree with the present state and circumstances of the testimony for religion and reformation which this Synod, with those under their inspection, are maintaining; particularly, that it does not agree unto, nor consist with an entering into the bond for renewing our solemn covenants: And that, therefore, those of the Secession cannot further, with safety of conscience, and without sin, swear any burgess-oath with the said religious clause, while matters with reference to the profession and settlement of religion continue in such circumstances as at present. Moreover, the Synod find, that burgesses of the Secession, who are already concerned in such oaths, should be required, in order to their admission into the bond for renewing our solemn covenants, to attend conference with their respective sessions, for signifying satisfaction with the present judgment of the Synod, and a sense of the mistake they have hitherto, through inadvertency, been under concerning such

burgess-oaths." A counter-motion was made, that the Synod delay coming to a decision on this question till their next meeting. But the first motion was carried by a majority of thirteen to nine. It being the second week of the Synod when this question was decided, a number of the members who had gone home at the close of the first week had not returned; but this did not render the decision less valid, though an attempt was afterward made to bring discredit upon it, by insisting upon the comparatively small majority by which the question was carried. Against this decision Messrs Ralph Erskine, James Fisher, William Hutton, Henry Erskine, and John M'Cara, ministers; and James Wardlaw and William Robertson, elders, protested. Mr James Mair craved that it be marked in the records, that while he laboured under difficulties with regard to the religious clause in the burgess-oath, yet he did not find himself at liberty to acquiesce in the Synod's decision, pronouncing the swearing of it to be sinful, and inconsistent with the testimony of the Secession Church. Messrs Adam Gib, Thomas Mair, and James Thomson, were appointed a committee to answer the reasons of protest, so soon as they should be given in.

At the next meeting of the Synod, in September, the protesters insisted that their reasons of protest, which had been lodged with the clerk in the month of June, should be read; but this was opposed, on the ground that the committee appointed at the former meeting had not yet prepared answers to the reasons. A proposal was then made, and acquiesced in by all parties, that some time should be spent in conference and prayer, with a view to remove any misunderstandings that might have been occasioned by the proceedings of their last meeting. After some time had been spent in these exercises, without producing the desired effect, it was moved that the following question be put to the vote, viz. *Whether the decision of the former Synod, respecting the burgess-oath, should be a term of ministerial and christian communion, so as to exclude any from church-fellowship who might differ in judgment from said decision, or to expose any minister or*

christian to the censures of the church? Mr Moncrieff protested against this motion being entertained, on the ground that it had been introduced *per saltum*, and that the received principles of the Synod were called in question by it: and he moved, *Lay aside this question, and proceed immediately to the business of the Synod, or not?* This gave rise to long altercation. The previous question was then put, Which of the two motions should first be voted? And the sense of the house being taken on this question, it carried in favour of the first being put to the vote. Another long and stormy debate ensued. One party in the Synod insisted that those who brought forward this motion should give some explanation of it, so as to determine whether, if the question should be decided in the negative, this would be equivalent to declaring, that the Synod's decision should not be a term of communion, *whatever course* of opposition to it might be pursued in time coming. Such an explanation the other party refused to give.* When the vote was about to be taken, Mr Gib protested against the question being put in its present form, without some explanation being given, as he conceived that it would be both irregular and unreasonable to do so. Messrs Clarkson and Archibald, ministers, and Mr Adam Wilson, elder, adhered to his protest.

Another motion was brought forward, viz. *Proceed to putting the above question, or delay the same till next meeting?* This occasioned another angry discussion. Mr Fisher, and other thirteen members, protested against the motion being voted, on the ground that it would amount to “a material declaration of the mind of the Synod, that the act of last Synod, concerning the first clause of some burgess-oaths, is a term of ministerial and christian communion.” The vote was then taken, when it carried *Delay*, against which decision sixteen members protested.

Mr Ebenezer Erskine, who had not been present at the meeting of Synod in April, when the sentence condemning the religious clause in the burgess-oaths was passed, now rose up

* Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 44.

and asked, *Whether the Synod would reverse said sentence or not?* And the Synod having refused to entertain such a proposal, he gave in a declaration of adherence to the protest formerly taken against the decision, for reasons to be lodged with the moderator, before the 1st of February. In this declaration, he was joined by Mr David Horn, and two elders. Mr Ralph Erskine also protested for “liberty of a more solemn and further testimony against the whole of the Synod’s conduct concerning the question in debate at this and former meetings, when he shall find cause.” To this protest five ministers and five elders adhered.*

The meeting of Synod, which assembled at Edinburgh, on the 7th of April 1747, is one, the proceedings of which cannot be perused without feelings of the deepest regret. The discussions of this meeting were peculiarly stormy, and the issue of it was truly deplorable. Those good men who, for a number of years had co-operated harmoniously together in vindicating the cause of truth, and in advancing the interests of religion, were destined to witness, on this occasion, the disruption of those ties, by which they had hitherto been united in the fellowship of the church, as well as in the endearing intimacies of private friendship. Since the commencement of the controversy respecting the burgess-oath, a spirit of alienation had gradually been gaining ground; and every new debate connected with this subject, tended to alienate the parties more and more, until, as in the case of Paul and Barnabas, the contention at this meeting “was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.”

The uncommon interest which the discussion of this question had excited, amongst both ministers and people, produced on the present occasion a full attendance of members. Out of thirty-two ministers belonging to the Synod, twenty-nine were present, and the number of elders that attended, was twenty-seven, making in all a sederunt of fifty-six mem-

* Gib’s Display, vol. ii. p. 45.

bers.* Mr James Mair presided as moderator, and Mr William Hutton acted as clerk *pro tempore*.

On the second day of the meeting, it was moved that the Synod should proceed to give a decision on the question, the final determination of which had been delayed from the last meeting till the present. This question, at the present meeting, was thrown into a new and more extended form, and ran in the following terms:—"Whether the decision anent the religious clause in some burgess-oaths, passed by this Synod, in April 1746, shall now or afterwards be made a term of ministerial and christian communion, aye and until the making of the same to be so, shall be referred, by way of overture, unto presbyteries and kirk-sessions, in order to their giving judgment thereanent; that so there may, in the mean time, be a friendly dealing among the members of this

* Having noticed, in perusing some of the controversial pamphlets on this question, that the authors vary in the statements which they give of the number of members present at this Synod, I have here inserted from the records of Synod, a *correct* list of the sederunt, both of ministers and elders. The ministers present were, Messrs James Mair (Linton), Moderator; Alexander Moncrieff, Abernethy; Ebenezer Erskine, Stirling; James Fisher, Glasgow; Ralph Erskine, Dunfermline; Adam Gib, Edinburgh; Thomas Mair, Orwell; William Hutton, Stow; Andrew Clarkson, Linlithgow; Patrick Matthew, Midholm; James Scot, Gateshaw; John White, Dunse; George Murray, Annandale; Robert Archibald, Haddington; John Smith, Jedburgh; David Smyton, Kilmaurs; David Horn, Cambusnethan; Henry Erskine, Falkirk; John M'Cara, Kilbarchan; Andrew Black, Cumbernauld; Andrew Thomson, Mearns; David Telfar, Bridge-of-Teith; James Thomson, Burntisland; George Brown, Perth; William Campbell, Ceres; John Erskine, Leslie; William Mair, Muckhart; James Johnston, Dundee; and Isaac Paton, Templepatrick, Ireland.

The elders present were, Messrs Robert Paterson, from the session of Stirling; John Marshall, from Glasgow; Samuel Harper, from Kilmaurs; Peter Edmond, from Balfron; Robert Keder, from Cambusnethan; John Callander, from Falkirk; William Millar, from Kilbarchan; James Millar, from ———; Thomas Ford, from Linton; Robert Lees, from Stow; John Mowbray, from Edinburgh; Andrew Graham, from Linlithgow; Charles Scot, from Midholm; Walter Henderson, from Gateshaw; John Wilson, from Dunse; James Johnstone, from Lockerby; William Manderson, from Haddington; Andrew Douglas, from Jedburgh; James Beugo, from Dunfermline; Alexander Lyal, from Burntisland; William Henderson, from Abernethy; George Coventry, from Orwell; Robert Wishart, from Perth; David Donaldson, from Ceres; Thomas Bogie, from Leslie; Thomas Drysdale, from Muckhart; and David Millar, from Dundee.

Synod with one another, in a way of conference and prayer, in order to their coming, through the Lord's pity, to see eye to eye in the matter of the said religious clause, or not." It was urged, that the determining of this question was the first business to which the Synod was pledged, by its vote at last meeting. In opposition to this view of the matter, it was as strenuously urged by others, that, before proceeding to give an authoritative answer to this question, the Synod should read and consider the reasons of protest against the foresaid decision, and the answers to these reasons; as, until this was done (it was alleged), many members, especially the elders, who had not been present at former discussions, could not be supposed to possess sufficient information on the subject, to enable them to say whether the decision should be made a term of communion, or not. The following motion was proposed by those persons who entertained these sentiments, viz. *Proceed to call for the reasons of protest, and the answers thereto, or not?* A long and a hot debate ensued, which terminated in a proposal that the sense of the house should be taken on the question, which of the motions should first be put to the vote? But here a new difficulty was started, which gave rise to another debate not less keen than the preceding one. Some insisted, that the persons who had protested against the decision of the Synod, in April 1746, were parties, and had no right to vote upon this question. To this it was replied, that the present question referred to the order of procedure, and was altogether distinct from the one upon which the protest had been taken. It was further urged, that, even in voting on their own proposal they were not parties, because it was one thing, they contended, for the Synod to give a decision on any point, and another thing to make that decision a term of communion. Unless this were conceded, it would necessarily follow, that all decisions of Synods are *ipso facto* terms of communion. This point of order being conceded, and the vote being taken on the above question, it carried by a majority of twenty-nine to twenty-two, that the first motion should be proposed

to the house for judgment, before that the reasons of protest, and the answers, were considered. From this decision, Mr Campbell dissented, and Messrs Thomas Mair and Moncrieff adhered to his dissent, “ with a craving that the door might be open, at next sederunt, for carrying this testimony farther, as they should see cause.”

When the Synod met on the forenoon of the following day (the 9th), the question, which the Synod had voted on the previous night should next be decided, was resumed ; and a vote concerning it proposed. Whereupon Mr Thomas Mair declared his adherence to his former dissent from this resolution, “ craving liberty still, to carry this testimony farther as he should see cause ;” in which declaration he was joined by Messrs Moncrieff, Gib, James Thomson, Clarkson, Scot, Brown, Campbell, Whyte, Murray, Archibald, and William Mair, ministers ; with ten elders. Notwithstanding this, the brethren who were opposed to the decision formerly given, still insisted that the question should be put, whether said decision should be a term of communion or not. Mr Gib then laid, in his own name and in the name of all who should adhere to him, the following protestation upon the Synod’s table :—

“ Whereas, the Reverend Synod did yesternight resolve by a vote, that instead of proceeding to call for the *Reasons* of protestation against their sentence in April 1746, about a religious clause of some burgess-oaths, with the *Answers* to said reasons, for being read and considered, they would proceed unto a vote upon the following question, viz. *Whether the decision anent the religious clause in some burgess-oaths, passed by this Synod in April 1746, shall now or afterwards be made a term of ministerial and christian communion, aye and until the making of the same to be so, shall be referred by way of overture unto presbyteries and kirk-sessions, in order to their giving their judgment thereanent ; that so there may, in the meantime, be a friendly dealing among the members of this Synod with one another, in a way of conference and prayer, in order to their coming, through the Lord’s pity, to see eye to*

eye in the matter of said religious clause, or not? And whereas the putting the foresaid question to a vote is still and at great length, insisted for, according to the resolution of yesternight: I, Adam Gib, minister of the gospel in the Associate Congregation at Edinburgh, do hereby, in mine own name, and in the name of all in this Synod who shall herein adhere unto me, protest against putting the foresaid question to a vote; and that it ought to be thrown *simpliciter* out of the minutes, with all that has passed thereupon; that so the Synod may proceed regularly in their proper business: Because this question was irregularly thrust in upon the Synod at first, and has all along been irregularly pushed, unto the turning of them aside from their proper business and duty: And because the question proceeds upon a resolution of yesternight, suppressing proper light about the subject of the question, to be had from a consideration of the above mentioned Reasons and Answers: And because the question is laid and calculated for imposing upon and perverting the judgment of members; seeing the manifest scope thereof, as laid and insisted upon, is to set the names and pleasures of men in the room of truth and duty in this affair: And because this question is for introducing a sinful and dangerous innovation of subjecting the lawful decision of Synod, upon a controversy of faith and case of conscience, unto the consultation of inferior judicatories, particularly kirk-sessions: And because an affirmative upon this question must run upon a toleration-scheme, in direct opposition to the Lord's word, and presbyterian principles; by judicially allowing, at least for a time, the swearing contradictory oaths; one homologating all the public defections and corruptions of the day, which we testify against; and the other condemning all these, as grounds of the Lord's controversy to be testified against: With other reasons that may be added in due time. And protesting for liberty to enlarge upon the foresaid with other reasons, as I shall find myself in duty and conscience obliged; I hereupon take instruments."

To this protestation all the above mentioned ministers,

with the exception of Mr Scot and Mr William Mair, adhered.

After a protracted discussion, the Synod adjourned for an hour, and met again at eight o'clock in the evening, when the same scenes of angry contention were renewed. Several members, among whom was the moderator, Mr James Mair, afraid that, if the question were pushed to a vote in the present excited state of the house, a rupture would be the consequence, urged a delay. Others were of opinion, that after the discussions which had taken place, a delay would be productive of no good result, and insisted that the vote should be taken. When the question was about to be put, Mr Moncrieff gave in the following protestation:—"Whereas, notwithstanding of protestation regularly entered to the contrary, the Reverend Synod is going on to a vote upon this question, viz. *Whether the decision anent the religious clause in some burgess-oaths, passed by this Synod in April 1746, shall now or afterward be made a term of communion, aye and until the making of the same to be so, &c.* I, Alexander Moncrieff, minister of the gospel at Abernethy, do, in mine own name, and in the name of all who shall herein adhere unto me, Protest, that this meeting is not, nor ought to be held and reputed a due and lawfully constituted meeting of the Associate Synod *in this step*: Because they are proceeding upon a resolution of yesternight, which suppresses proper light upon the subject of the question, while many members were never present at any judicial examination thereof; and some have been complaining, that they are precluded from necessary acquaintance therewith: And because, notwithstanding of much insisting to the contrary, the members protesting against the sentence of the Synod in April 1746, who are necessarily and directly parties upon the question, are sustaining themselves judges for voting in it: And protesting for liberty to enlarge the above reasons, and to carry on this testimony as I shall find myself in duty and conscience obliged; I hereupon take instruments."

All the ministers who had previously concurred in Mr

Mair's dissent, together with Mr Patrick Matthew, and ten elders, adhered to this protest. The question was then put, and it carried, That the decision of the Synod in April 1746 shall not be made a term of ministerial and christian communion, "aye and until the making of the same to be so shall be referred by way of overture unto presbyteries and kirk sessions, in order to their giving their judgment thereanent," &c. Of fifty-five members who were present,* only twenty (*nine* ministers and *eleven* elders) voted on this question, and all of them gave their vote in favour of the decision that was carried; twenty-three (*thirteen* ministers and *ten* elders) having previously protested against putting the question, did not consider themselves at liberty to give any vote; while there were a few who did not vote, because they were anxious that the court should delay, in present circumstances, coming to a final decision in the matter.

Immediately after the vote Mr Thomas Mair read the following declaration and protestation:—"Whereas this meeting of Synod have now passed a vote, and made a resolution upon the affirmative of that question which has been insisted upon, in opposition to a proceeding unto the Reasons of protest against the sentence of Synod in April 1746, with the Answers to said Reasons: And considering the two protestations which have been entered this day, concerning that affair: And considering, that, by the foresaid step, this meeting of Synod have materially dropped the whole testimony among their hands; allowing of, at least for a time, a *material abjuration* thereof: And considering that, beside a considerable number of elders, the majority of ministers in this meeting, who are the proper judges in a controversy of faith and case of conscience, and who could be judges in the present controversy, have been all along, at this meeting, contending for the proper business and duty of the Synod; in opposition to the contrary torrent: Therefore, I Thomas Mair, minister of the gospel at Orwell, do hereby DECLARE and PROTEST, That the *lawful authority and power of the*

* One of the elders had previously left the house, through indisposition.

Associate Synod is devolved upon, and must lie in a constitute meeting of the foresaid members, ministers and elders; together with any other members who shall cleave unto them, in a way of confessing what sinful steps and compliances they have fallen into upon this occasion; As likewise I DECLARE and PROTEST, That the foresaid members ought, in duty to the Lord and his heritage, to *take up and exercise* the authority and power of the Associate Synod, lawfully and fully devolved upon them as above; and, for this end, to meet to-morrow at ten of the clock forenoon, in Mr Gib's house, that they may regularly enter upon and proceed in the business of the Synod." *

After reading this paper, Mr Mair and the twenty-two protesters who adhered to him left the house. The moderator, pleading indisposition, requested liberty to retire, which was granted, and the chair was occupied by Mr Ebenezer Erskine. The members that remained, distressed on account of what had taken place, appointed a meeting to be held on the forenoon of the following day for prayer and humiliation, which was done accordingly; and before they finally separated, they appointed a day of fasting and humiliation to be observed in all their congregations, assigning as the reason of such an appointment, that the Lord "had divided them in his anger, and covered the daughter of Zion with a thick cloud, giving them also the wine of astonishment to drink." Without entering on any other business, they adjourned to meet at Stirling in the month of June.

All the ministers and elders who had withdrawn from the Synod, with the exception of Mr William Mair, who returned home, met on the following forenoon (the 10th April), in Mr Gib's house, and being constituted by Mr Thomas Mair, they passed an *Act asserting their constitution and rights according to previous contendings for the same*. In this act they "Find, according to the foresaid DECLARATION and PROTESTATION, That the *lawful authority and power* of the Associate Synod is lawfully and fully devolved upon them,

* Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 55.

and lies among their hands ; That they are the only lawful and rightly constitute Associate Synod, with the said authority and power : And that they are obliged, in duty to the Lord and his heritage, to exercise the same, for supporting and carrying on the Testimony which the Lord has put into the hand of the Associate Synod ; in opposition to the material dropping, and allowing of (at least for a time), a material abjuration of that whole Testimony, by the resolutions foresaid, and the method of carrying the same.”*

At another sederunt the same day, they passed a second *Act further asserting the rights and constitution of the Associate Synod*, in which they “ Find that none of the ministers and elders, presently in a way of separating from the Associate Synod, through turning aside from the lawful constitution thereof, and from the Testimony among their hands, ought or can return to a seat in this Synod, but in the way of confessing the sinful steps and compliances which they have severally fallen into, about the two resolutions formerly mentioned, and the method of carrying the same : That none of the associate presbyteries can be lawful in their constitutions or proceedings, but in a way of subordination to this Synod ; or, at least in a way of waiting until the state of the present cause and controversy be got laid particularly open unto them :—That only those elders of the respective associate congregations who shall be disposed as above, together with a minister in subordination to this Synod, can make up the lawful and rightly constitute sessions of these congregations : That (seeing the majority of ministers in the associate presbytery of Glasgow, have been active in carrying on the foresaid resolutions), the said associate presbytery of Glasgow cannot be lawful in their constitution or proceedings, nor be lawfully acknowledged as such, by any who are cleaving to the Lord’s cause and testimony, until the said presbytery shall return unto that cause and testimony, in subordination to this Synod : That none of the ministers or elders foresaid ought or can return unto a seat in either of

* Acts and Proceedings of the Associate Synod, p. 6.

the other two associate presbyteries, nor to moderate or sit in any associate sessions; but in the way of confessing the sinful steps and compliances which they have severally fallen into, about the two resolutions foresaid, and the method of carrying the same: That none of the probationers in the Secession ought or can lawfully preach the gospel, but in subordination to this Synod; nor take appointments for that end, but from presbyteries in due subordination thereto: That the young men presently on trials before the associate presbytery of Glasgow, for licence to preach the gospel as probationers, ought to be remitted unto one or both of the other two associate presbyteries, for this purpose: And, finally, that (as the foresaid ministers and elders are hereby invited and beseeched, in brotherly love, to return unto their duty, so) the Synod ought, in due time, and as the Lord shall clear their way, to consider upon calling them to an account for their conduct foresaid, according to the discipline of the Lord's House; providing they shall not return to this Synod, in the way of confessing the sinful steps and compliances which they have severally fallen into, as above."*

Having passed these two acts, they adjourned till Tuesday of the following week, which was observed by them in fasting and humiliation; particularly "in confessing our own manifold provocations, failings, and infirmities, with the sinful steps and compliances that have been taken and made on the present occasion, as to the management of the Associate Synod: and likewise in thankful acknowledgment of what pity and direction the Lord has, at the same time, been graciously pleased to manifest for the support of his cause and testimony; as also for calling on the Lord, that he may be graciously pleased to strengthen that which he hath wrought for us."†

On Wednesday forenoon (15th April), they passed an act condemnatory of the motion carried in the Synod on the preceding Wednesday, against calling for the Reasons and An-

* Acts and Proceedings of the Associate Synod, p. 7.

† Gib's Display, Vol. II. p. 77.

swers ; this resolution they condemned, “ as a step very sinful and dangerous in a way most unreasonable and disorderly.” They further agreed, that the Reasons of protest and the Answers thereto, should be read and considered ; and they unanimously approved of the Answers, when corrected and amended, “ as taking off the pretended force of the Reasons foresaid.”* On the following day, they condemned the resolution adopted by the Synod, on the preceding Thursday, which occasioned the separation. In their condemnatory sentence, they characterised it as “ a step which, though it left the foresaid sentence of April 1746 *formally standing*, was yet a *material reversing* of the same ; so that, with awful inconsistency, it enacted and enjoined an allowance, at least for some time, of a practice which has been, and still is found to be, a profanation of the Lord’s name, and a material abjuration of his whole cause and testimony among the hands of the Associate Synod.”

At the same sederunt, they unanimously passed an *Act concerning the ministers and elders presently in a way of separating from the Associate Synod* ; in which they find “ that they are highly censurable, and have themselves, by this mal-administration, fallen from all right and title to any *present actual exercise* of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, committed by the Lord Jesus to the office-bearers of his house, aye and until they be sensible of the sinfulness of their above conduct, acknowledging the same to the glory of God, and return unto their duty to him.”

The two following questions were also added to their formula, for being put to young men before receiving licence, and to ministers before ordination, viz. “ 1st, Are you satisfied with, and do you purpose to adhere unto, and maintain the principles about the present civil government, which are declared and maintained in the Associate Presbytery’s answers to Mr Nairn’s reasons of dissent, with the defence thereunto subjoined.” “ 2d, Do you acknowledge and promise subjection to this presbytery, in subordination to the Associate

* Gib’s Display, Vol. II. p. 77.

Synod, as presently constituted, in a way of testifying against the sinful management of the prevailing party in the Synod, at some of the first diets of their meeting at Edinburgh in April 1747, or other presbyteries in that subordination, as you shall be regularly called ; and do you approve of, and purpose to adhere unto and maintain the said testimony in your station and capacity ; and do you approve of, and purpose to adhere unto and maintain the sentence of Synod in April 1746, concerning the religious clause of some burgess-oaths, and that in opposition to all tenets and practices to the contrary.” *

They appointed extracts from the above acts to be sent to the several presbyteries and sessions ; and they ordered a day of fasting and humiliation to be observed in all their congregations. They then adjourned till the month of August.

In consequence of the events detailed in the preceding pages, the Associate Synod became divided into two separate portions, each claiming to be the only lawfully constituted Synod of the Secession Church, while each denied to its rival this exclusive claim. From this period till the time of the re-union, these two Synods held their meetings separately ; and each exercised over that portion of the church which adhered to it, a jurisdiction altogether independent of the other. Though both of them assumed the same title, viz. that of “ the Associate Synod,” yet distinctive designations, suggested by the controversy in which the separation originated, were bestowed upon them in common parlance ; and as the appellations were tacitly, though not formally, admitted by themselves, I shall employ them in the subsequent part of the narrative, for the sake of distinguishing the one party from the other, without intending any disparagement to either. That party who approved of the decision of the Synod in April 1746, condemning as sinful, and as inconsistent with the Secession testimony, the swearing of the religious clause in certain burgess-oaths, were designated

* Display, Vol. II. p. 79.

“Antiburgher ;” the other party who opposed the Synod’s giving any decision on this question, and who contended that it should be declared not to be a term of communion, were designated “Burgher,” and hence these two terms became distinctive of the two Synods.

In the farther prosecution of this history, it will be necessary that I give a separate narrative of the proceedings of each Synod. But before drawing this chapter to a close, I shall here introduce, in connexion with the events that led to the rupture, a summary account of the course of procedure which the two Synods adopted in reference to one another, immediately after the rupture took place. In doing this, I anticipate a little the order of time, that I may not have occasion, in the subsequent part of the narrative, to revert to a subject so unpleasant in itself, and so much calculated to excite painful feelings.

When the Burgher brethren met at Stirling in June, according to their appointment, representations of grievances, and petitions for advice were presented to them from certain elders and members connected with the congregations of Linlithgow, Haddington, and Ceres. The Synod delayed giving any particular answer at that time, and desired the petitioners to wait patiently, till matters should come to a farther bearing. A strong desire was expressed by the brethren assembled at this meeting, that some steps should be taken, with a view to bring matters to an amicable settlement, betwixt them and that portion of the Synod who adhered to the opposite side ; and it was agreed that a communication should be sent, *extra-judicially*, requesting a meeting to be held betwixt the two parties for prayer and conference, in order that the breach which had taken place might be healed. The following letter was written by Mr Ebenezer Erskine, in name of the brethren, and copies of it were sent to Mr Thomas Mair and Mr Gib.*

* Act of the Associate Synod, declaring the grounds upon which the supplies were granted, &c.

TO MR THOMAS MAIR.

Stirling, June 19, 1747.

“ R. D. B.—The members of the Associate Synod that met in this place having, in the interval of one of their meetings, communed together extrajudicially anent the circumstances which you and we are brought into in adorable providence ; and considering, that whereas it is supposed there are two Associate Synods at present, acting in opposition to one another, what fatal and pernicious consequences this must necessarily have among the people under our inspection, both in this country and elsewhere, is evident, as tending natively to break and rend them to pieces, and consequently marring the success of the gospel, and hindering the progress of witnessing work among them, and opening the mouths of enemies against the testimony for the covenanted reformation we all equally profess to maintain, and thus hardening the present generation in their atheism, infidelity, and opposition to the way of God and godliness, and to the name and honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“ Therefore the brethren were unanimously of opinion, that however wide the present breach is made in holy providence between you and them, yet it is their duty to pursue peace with their brethren even when it seems to fly from them, and to endeavour that no mean be neglected on their part for healing the breach, and preventing the continuation of such a dismal rupture. For this end, they agree to propose unto you, that there be a meeting betwixt you and them, in order to prayer and conference, for trying whether it is possible we can be brought to coalesce in the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of peace, and for endeavouring, as it becomes those that love the truth and peace, to be found (in the use of such appointed means) waiting upon him who is the God of peace, that can bruise Satan under their feet, and saying, ‘ Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us, he hath smitten, and will bind us up.’ That the design of the foresaid proposal might not be frustrate, the brethren did not choose to make it in a judicial way, nor intend the conference should be upon the footing of church authority, but merely as brethren equally bound, by our covenant of peace and love, to cultivate harmony in the Lord, that his name may yet be honoured among us, his people cemented, and his work advanced. This, in the name, and at the desire of the brethren here, is from, R. D. B. yours most affectionately in the Lord,

“ EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

“ P. S.—With submission it is proposed, that the time and place of meeting be at Dunfermline, Tuesday the 21st July. Your answer is expected as soon as possible, that in case the motion is refused, I may have access to prevent the unnecessary up-coming of the brethren at that time.

“ I need not add, in regard the nature of the thing bears it, that this be communicated to all the brethren in connexion with you on your side of the river. Another copy of what is above is sent to Mr Gib, to be communicated to the brethren concerned on the south side of the Forth.”

Mr Mair’s answer to this communication, is dated at Muckhart, June 24, 1747, and is to the following effect :—

“ R. and D. B.—I received your missive, which I communicated to the brethren who were met here. We are heartily sorry for the present posture of affairs, but desire to adore the Lord in his dispensations of providence, hoping that, though they are humbling to us, yet by them he will exalt himself. The affair you write of, concerns the Associate Synod ; and the method of coalescence you mention, or the way of being received back to a seat in the Synod, is notour to you, and the brethren with you, from the acts and proceedings of the Synod ; from all which it is easy to learn how you are to apply yourselves unto them, at their meeting, the first Tuesday of August next. Though it is our endeavour to pray heartily for you every day, and although we do maintain all due regard to you and the brethren, yet your proposals are absolutely inconsistent with supporting the testimony of the day, which we could show from many reasons, most of which, we believe, may easily occur to yourselves, and which we forbear to narrate particularly, lest it should rather prove irritating, than a mean of softening you. Wishing the Lord may incline you to fall in with the healing measures laid down in the acts of the Synod, and make you sensible how far you have increased your fault, by constituting yourselves unwarrantably into a pretended Synod, and offering dutiful respects to you, and the brethren with you : This in name, and at the desire of all the brethren here, is all at present, from R. and D. B., your affectionate brother, and humble servant in the Lord,

“ THOMAS MAIR.”

Mr Gib’s reply to the same communication, was couched in the following terms :—

Edinburgh, July 11, 1747.

“ V. R. D. F.—Having received your letter of June 19th, and ha-

ing embraced the first proper occasion for communicating the same to my brethren concerned on this side of the river, by doing so betwixt sederunts, to such of them as met here this week in presbytery, the answer now made is common.

“ As to the mournful circumstances which we are brought into with some dear fathers and brethren, we desire both to seek and submit to the healing thereof in all suitable ways; but we have no freedom to fall in with the proposal made by the brethren you speak of; considering, on the one hand, that they have plainly interwoven with their proposal an assertion of their synodical constitution, a justification of their conduct in the present affair, and a condemnation of the Associate Synod; and considering, on the other hand, that the affair writ of is the Synod’s work, which is *hactenus judicata*, so that the method of coalescence is already concluded upon.

“ But not choosing to enlarge here, the above is offered, and in name of the brethren foresaid, with dutiful respects to the brethren with you, by V. R. D. F, yours respectfully,

“ ADAM GIB.”

The next meeting of the Burgher Synod was held at Dunfermline, in the month of September. At this meeting, petitions were laid before them, from the elders and members of the congregations that had applied to them, in the month of June, earnestly requesting that the brethren would send them a supply of preaching, and appoint an ordained minister to baptize their children. As the Synod were unwilling to do any thing that might widen the breach which had been already occasioned, they delayed, for the present, granting a supply of sermon *within the bounds of congregations*, where ministers were ordained, but agreed that the petitioners, upon producing proper testimonials, might have church privileges dispensed to them, *without the bounds of their respective congregations*. They further recommended to the people of these congregations, that they ought not to forsake their stated places of worship, or withdraw themselves abruptly from their ministers, without previously stating to them the reasons which induced them to do so.

At a *pro re nata* meeting, held at Stirling, in the following month, they passed an “ *Act declaring the nullity of the pre-*

tended synod, that first met in Mr Gib's house, in Bristo, near Edinburgh, April 10, 1747." The following is a summary of the reasons assigned in the act, for pronouncing this condemnatory sentence.

1. The meeting was not lawfully indicted by the moderator, as the mouth of the Synod, but by a private brother, without liberty sought or given, or any motion made to know the mind of the Synod in the matter.

2. It was indicted to meet on a sudden, even within a few hours, that is, at ten o'clock next day, in Mr Gib's house.

3. The Synod was already lawfully constituted, before these brethren withdrew; and neither the moderator nor clerk of Synod, regularly chosen by the vote of the Synod, were present in that foresaid meeting.

4. Elders are elected by their several sessions, as commissioners to the Synod; but these brethren separated themselves from the Synod, and constituted, without the consent of the sessions whom they represented, and therefore could not represent them in a pretended constitution of synod, which the church knew nothing of when they were elected and commissioned.

5. The person who indicted that nominal synod to meet in Mr Gib's house, as he only called a part, and not the whole of the constituent members of the Associate Synod, so he excluded ministers, and also elders, who were lawfully elected to attend.

6. Because it is not the Associate Synod to which accessions were made, for a considerable time bygone, by ministers and others.

7. This meeting was called and indicted irregularly, in respect of the circumstances both of time and place, namely, at the time when, and in the place where, the Associate Synod were sitting, regularly constituted in the name of the glorious Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose presence was invoked by the moderator, as the mouth of the Synod.

8. There was no sinful thing required of these brethren ; no new or unlawful term of communion imposed on them ; no imposition at all put, or so much as proposed to be put, upon them by their brethren, differing from them in their judgment in this matter.

9. At that meeting at which our brethren withdrew, April 9th, the Synod was as lawfully constituted as in former meetings ; particularly as lawfully as it was April 8th. Now, both sides agree that the former meetings were lawful, and the separating brethren themselves owned the meeting, April 8th, to be lawful.

10. The constitution of said pretended synod is founded upon many grievous calumnies and heavy charges laid against the Synod, without the least shadow of proof.

11. The said pretended synod consisted of members who, upon their disorderly separating themselves from the Synod, and constituting apart from it, sustained themselves not only judges, but sole judges and condemners of the two votes against which they read their protestations.

12. There is just the same reason for nullifying this pretended synod, and the five acts they mention in the title of their book, that the famous Assembly at Glasgow, 1638, give for nullifying the pretended assembly that met at Perth, and the articles that were concluded there, commonly called *The Five Articles of Perth*. *

When the same brethren met at Stirling in April 1748, renewed petitions were presented to them from the congregations that had formerly applied for sermon ; and in addition to these, representations and petitions were laid on their table from some of the elders and members in connexion with the congregations of Perth, Abernethy, and Edinburgh, complaining of the disagreeable situation in which they were placed, in consequence of the divided state of sentiment both in the sessions and in the congregations ; and requesting that the Synod would send them a separate supply of sermon. After some consideration, the Synod delayed giving

* The Re-exhibition of the Testimony, p. 265.

a final answer to the petitioners, until a *pro re nata* meeting, which they appointed to be held at Falkirk on the twenty-fourth of May; and, in the mean time, they agreed that another attempt should be made to effect a reconciliation with their former fellow-labourers. The following letter being approved of by the meeting, a copy was appointed to be sent by the moderator to each of the brethren.*

Stirling, April 15, 1748.

“ R. D. B.—The Synod met in this place, considering that several petitions for preaching have come before them from time to time, importing that you and your brethren that have separated from the Synod, have gone off from the grounds upon which you and we made Secession from the present backsliding judicatories, and upon which the petitioners accede to the associate judicatories, and submitted to your ministry; and that through deserting these grounds, some of you have upon the matter, deserted your flocks, and thrust them away from you, by imposing new terms of communion upon them, not warranted in the word of God; and that you have gone into several disorderly and divisive practices, whereby the Lord’s heritage is much shattered and broken: Therefore, the Synod, before they appoint supply to these in your respective congregations, who have made complaints to us, have appointed me to acquaint you, that the Synod is to meet at Falkirk upon Tuesday the twenty-fourth day of May next, and to require, and earnestly desire, that you and your brethren (to each of whom a letter in these same words is sent), may attend the said meeting, that so there may be a friendly conference with prayer, upon the present differences that have taken place among ministers and people of the Association, particularly relating to the subject of the above named petitions; whereby you may evidently see the lenity of the Synod, and their desire of peace and unity in the Lord. This in name, and by the appointment of the Associate Synod, is subscribed in their presence, by R. D. B., yours affectionately,

“ DAVID HORN, *moderator.*”

None of the brethren, to whom this letter was sent, attended the meeting at Falkirk; and the Synod agreed, that, after such a long delay, they should now “ grant supply of preaching to the petitioners within the congregations of the separ-

* Act of the Associate Synod, declaring the grounds upon which supplies were granted, &c.

ating brethren, applying to them, notwithstanding they had not proceeded to inflict any ecclesiastical censure upon these brethren." In vindication of their conduct they framed and published an act, detailing at considerable length their reasons for adopting such a course of procedure. After this they made no farther proposals to their brethren, with a view to conciliation; neither did they attempt exercising toward them any ecclesiastical discipline.

The Antiburgher Synod having met at Edinburgh, according to their appointment, in the beginning of August 1747, took into consideration what discipline they would inflict on their Burgher brethren, having formerly declared them deserving of censure. The result of their deliberation, at this and two subsequent meetings of Synod, was a resolution to serve these brethren with a libel; and they summoned them to appear at the bar of their Synod, in the month of April 1748: The libel contained the following charges, drawn up in seven different articles:—

First, that Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, James Fisher, William Hutton, David Horn, Henry Erskine, and John M'Cara did protest against the decision of the Synod, in April 1746, condemning the present swearing of the religious clause in some burgess-oaths; and did afterwards give in their reasons of protest, "in a style and strain most indecent and undutiful, and containing false charges against the Synod in plain matters of fact."

Second, that they had, in one of their reasons of protest, vented and maintained a tenet of mutual forbearance, authorising the toleration of known and acknowledged sin.

Third, that the above ministers, together with Messrs Andrew Black, John Smith, and David Telfar, had pushed the first resolution (viz. to have a vote of the house upon the questions proposed by them, before calling for the reasons of protest), which was a secret thrust aimed at the decision of 1746; and that the ministers mentioned in the first article had violently sustained themselves judges in said question.

Fourth, that all of them had been active in voting the se-

cond resolution (viz. that the decision of 1746 should not be a term of communion, until referred to presbyteries and sessions), and had “thereby virtually dropped the whole testimony for reformation as among the hands of the Synod; giving allowance, at least for a time, for a renunciation thereof by oath.”

Fifth, that the ministers first mentioned had constituted themselves into a Synod at Stirling, in the month of June 1747, in a way of separating from the rightly constitute Associate Synod to which they belonged; thus engaging in a schismatical constitution for support of their foresaid backsliding course.

Sixth, that Messrs James Mair, William Hutton, Andrew Black, James Johnston, John Smith, and David Telfar, beside the several articles charged upon them as above, are art and part guilty in the whole of the articles charged upon their brethren; inasmuch as they have neither separated themselves from them, nor borne testimony against their offences.

Seventh, That Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, James Fisher, and John M'Cara, had framed and published pamphlets, in some of which they censured the decision of Synod in April 1746, and in others, condemned the constitution in Mr Gib's house in April 1747; and that the whole of the ministers mentioned in the above articles, had been guilty of framing and publishing an act, in their pretended Synodical capacity, declaring null and void the constitution and proceedings of the Synod that met in Mr Gib's house.*

When the Synod met in April, none of the ministers into whose hands the above libel was put, made their appearance. They were accordingly declared contumacious; and all the articles of the libel were found relevant, if proven, to infer censure. On the third day of the meeting, Mr William Hutton came into court, and craved leave to read a paper which, he stated, contained his sentiments on the subject,

* Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 282.

though he acknowledged that it was not in the form of answers to the articles of the libel. Permission being given him to read it, he introduced himself with a verbal declaration, " that he had retracted his protest against the decision of the Synod in April 1746, concerning the religious clause in some burgess-oaths, and that he was not now to be considered as standing in opposition to that decision: And, further, that he could not approve of the transmission in the second resolution or vote, which had been productive of so much mischief, being of the mind that it ought to have been dropped for the sake of peace, besides other objections which he had against it, and which he could state to any of the ministers in private."

His paper was then read, in which he attacked, in severe terms, the constitution and proceedings of the Synod before which he appeared, pronouncing their conduct to be schismatical and disorderly, charging them with excluding ruling elders from their just privileges, and with exacting a blind and implicit submission to all their acts and proceedings. He concluded by declaring, that he did not now appear before them as a pannel, in consequence of the citation that had been given him, but from a conscientious conviction that it was his duty to use such freedom with his fathers and brethren, as not to suffer sin to lie upon them; and, finally, that he was resolved to continue in the exercise of his ministry, notwithstanding any sentences that might be passed against him; averring, that as they could not be binding in heaven, so they should by him be held null and void.

Mr Hutton, after having read his paper, withdrew; and the Synod found that his present conduct, in bringing such charges against them, was highly censurable. At a subsequent sederunt they deposed him from the office of the holy ministry, and excommunicated him from the communion of the church in all its sealing ordinances, with certification, that if he did not return unto his duty, and apply to the Synod with a view to give satisfaction for the whole of his sinful conduct, they would proceed against him by the

highest censure of the church. All the articles of the libel were found proven against the other ministers in their material points, and they were accordingly suspended from the exercise of their ministry, with certification, that still higher censures would be inflicted on them, if they did not at next meeting of Synod make due acknowledgment for their past misconduct.

In the month of August, the Antiburgher Synod again met, when all the ministers formerly libelled were deposed from the office of the holy ministry, and suspended from the enjoyment of their privileges as members of the church, “with certification, that if they shall not return unto their duty, acknowledging unto the glory of God the several matters of heinous sin and scandal found proven against them, with their contumacy at last meeting, and their further contumacy in not compearing at this meeting, and apply unto the Synod, at their ordinary meeting in April next year, for giving satisfaction with regard to the whole of this their sinful course and conduct, the Synod will then consider upon proceeding against them with the highest censure of the church, as they shall see cause.”* They appointed intimation of this sentence to be made in all the congregations of these ministers, declaring the same to be now vacant.

At the meeting of the Synod in April 1749, the members reviewed their own conduct, in reference to the transactions which had taken place. Having found much in their temper and conduct that was sinful, they made mutual acknowledgments of guilt to one another, and underwent, in rotation, the ceremony of a rebuke. As the practice of *priry censures* in ecclesiastical courts, has now become obsolete, I shall here extract from the narrative of one who was present, the following account given by him, of the course of procedure pursued in the present instance;—premising that such a practice is much more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The matter, viewed in the light either of reason or of Scripture, appears to be altogether anomalous,—that the guilty

* Display vol. ii. p. 94.

should receive the confession of the guilty,—that the guilty should judge, rebuke, and absolve the guilty; and that after having done this, the judges should take the place of the culprits, and the culprits take the place of the judges, and rebuke and absolve those by whom they had themselves been previously rebuked and absolved. We have seen, in a former part of this history, that the members of the Associate Presbytery inflicted such censures upon one another soon after their separation from the national church, on account of certain omissions with which they were mutually chargeable. A similar ceremonial was gone through on the present occasion.

“ On this occasion,” says Mr Gib,* “ seven of the ministers, Messrs Alexander Moncrieff, Thomas Mair, Adam Gib, William Campbell, David Smyton, John Erskine, and Andrew Thomson, underwent a rebuke. The first four for offensive heat of temper and unadvisedness of language on several occasions, when debates happened in the Synod; and the other three for some former engagements in the course of the separating brethren, both before and after the breach. And those seven, with other nine, Messrs James Thomson, Andrew Clarkson, Patrick Matthew, James Scot, George Brown, John Whyte, George Murray, and William Mair, ministers, with John Wilson, elder from Dunse, underwent an admonition for those staggerings and short-comings at the meetings of Synod in September 1746, and April 1747, which have been formerly explained; as did also Mr Robert Archibald, when he came up on the following week. After which a suitable exhortation was given to seven other brethren who had not then belonged to the Synod, viz. Messrs John Muckersie at Kinkell, Alexander Blyth at Kinclaven, David Wilson at Kirkaldy, John Milligan at Orr, Matthew Moncrieff at Abernethy, William Moncrieff at Alloa, and John Goodlet at Sanquhar, with fourteen other elders now present.

“ This course of privy censure took place, upon a motion

* Display, vol. ii. p. 95.

made and agreed unto for that purpose ; so that the members who underwent a rebuke and admonition, rose up in their several turns, and made voluntary acknowledgments, none laying any thing to the charge of another ; and the whole was concluded in a diet of confession and prayer, relative to these sinful steps and compliances, staggerings, and shortcomings, which had taken place among them.

“ Nor was this the first time that they had become sensible of, and professed humiliation for, the evils now acknowledged by them. As they had been generally employed the same way, on several occasions formerly ; in a diet of confession and prayer at their first sederunt after the breach ; and in a synodical fast on the Tuesday then following ; as also, in a diet of confession and prayer, before the first proceeding to censure, beside the acknowledgments made by some brethren, at their return to the Synod, all represented in the foregoing part of their procedure. But they thought it proper, at this time, to have these matters particularly brought forth, and proceeded upon, as above, for the glory of God, and for self-abasement, suited to the humbling work now among their hands, and as a standing testimony against these falls and failings which they had been led to, through heaviness of spirit, and darkness about their way.”

Nothing was done at this meeting, with regard to the brethren who had been libelled, except entering a resolution upon the record, that they would take up the question, at their next meeting in August, about inflicting on all or some of them, the highest censures of the church. Accordingly, when the Synod met in the month of August, this business was again resumed, and Messrs Ralph Erskine, James Fisher, and William Hutton, were selected from among the rest, on account of special aggravations connected with their case ; and the sentence of the greater excommunication was, with all due formality, passed against them ; which sentence the moderator, after a sermon suitable to the occasion, pronounced *in verbis de presenti*. The other brethren, viz. Messrs Ebenezer Erskine, James Mair, David

Horn, Henry Erskine, John M'Cara, Andrew Black, James Johnston, John Smith, and David Telfar, had a similar sentence passed against them in the month of February 1750; and intimation was appointed to be made of these censures, within the several congregations with which these ministers were connected. Mr Patrick Matthew, minister at Midholm, entered his dissent against the Synod's adopting such severe measures; and having, in the course of the same year, withdrawn from the Synod, and joined the Burgher brethren, a similar censure was, after a course of process, inflicted on himself.

To say any thing that might have the effect of reviving a controversy which has long been consigned to oblivion, would be unwise. I shall, therefore, refrain from pronouncing an opinion with regard to the different views held by the opposing parties. That they were conscientious in maintaining these views, there is no reason to doubt; and if, in some respects, they attached an undue importance to them, this was not so much the fault of the men, as the spirit of the times in which they lived. There was certainly nothing blameable in their entertaining different sentiments on the points at issue; and, if they had only agreed to differ, all would have been well. But the mischief which the strife occasioned arose, in a great measure, from the unyielding spirit displayed on both sides. This spirit, instead of diminishing, increased with every succeeding debate. Neither party seemed inclined to surrender its favourite opinion, for the sake of coming to a closer agreement with the other; but, according as the one or other possessed a numerical superiority in the house, they availed themselves of their advantage, by pushing a vote in opposition to the remonstrances and protests of those who did not feel themselves at liberty to acquiesce. This mode of procedure was calculated to irritate; and, by being continued, meeting after meeting, during the progress of the burgess-oath debates, it led at length to a final separation of the parties.

The division of the Synod occasioned great confusion

throughout the whole of the associate body. Congregations and sessions were rent asunder by it. Friendships which had existed for a long number of years, were broken up; ministers who had been accustomed to assist one another at sacramental solemnities, no longer associated together on these solemn occasions; the people, distracted by abstruse discussions concerning the revolution-settlement, articles of union, and acts of Parliament, of which they were wholly ignorant, knew not what side to espouse; but, in general, the majority adopted the particular views held by their minister. Lawsuits respecting the property (where the congregation were divided in opinion), ensued over the whole country; and, as the parties were not recognized in law, as legally constituted bodies, the judges usually give their decisions in favour of that party to which the majority of the congregation adhered. Both from the pulpit and the press, the one party indulged in declamation against the other. Such a state of things could not but have an unfavourable effect upon religion. Bitter feelings were engendered, and unholy passions were called into play by the strife. There is one consolation, however, which we enjoy in looking back to this distressing period, and that is, the consolation of knowing that the gospel continued to be purely and faithfully preached by the ministers on both sides of the Secession; and that the dispute which tore them asunder, did not embrace in it the essentials of religion.

The controversy, after having raged with considerable fury for a number of years, gradually exhausted itself. The original combatants dropped, one by one, into the grave; and those who rose up to occupy their place, however decided they might be in maintaining the particular sentiments which they espoused, yet could not be supposed to engage with the same ardour in the contest. After a certain period had elapsed, the storm subsided into a calm. With the exception of a solitary pamphlet which now and then dropped from the pen of a partizan, and the repetition of a few standard phrases on particular occasions, little was either said or

done to perpetuate the remembrance of the strife. Each party got into a track of its own, and pursued it steadily, aiming at doing all the good in its power ; and, though the one Synod in its efforts to enlarge the circle of its influence, occasionally crossed the path of the other, yet a feeling of cordiality gradually gained ground. A train of favourable events brought the members more into contact with one another ; and, after a separation of nearly eighty years, as we shall have occasion more particularly to notice in a subsequent part of this history, the two Synods exhibited to the christian world the noble spectacle of being again united into one.

PART II.

CONTAINING THE HISTORY OF THE SECESSION FROM
THE BREACH IN THE SYNOD TILL THE
PERIOD OF THE RE-UNION.

HAVING now to record the proceedings of two Secession Synods, instead of one, this part of the narrative will run in two different streams. In one of these I shall give an account of the transactions of the General Associate, or, as it was ordinarily termed, *Antiburgher* Synod ; and in the other I shall give an account of the transactions of the Associate, or, as it was ordinarily termed (by way of distinction from its rival), *Burgher* Synod. Regarding it as a matter of indifference which of these accounts is given first in order, I shall, out of courtesy to my brethren, with whom I consider it an honour to be united, give the precedence in the narrative to the transactions of the General Associate Synod.

CHAPTER VI.

HISTORY OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATE (OR ANTIBURGHHER) SYNOD.

State of affairs in the Scottish Church. Increased power of the moderate party. "Riding committees" abolished. Presbytery of Linlithgow proves contumacious. Rebuked at the bar of the Assembly. Presbytery of Dunfermline refuses to ordain Mr Richardson. Case of Mr Gillespie of Carnock. Application by the General Assembly for an increase in their "livings." Opposed by the Scottish counties. Rejected by government. Lesson of humility taught. Constitution of the Synod in Mr Gib's house. Members present. Proceedings against Mr Nairn. Mr Nairn deposed and excommunicated. Novel scene. Mr Nairn returns to the national church. Makes an humble confession. Is rebuked in the Kirkaldy presbytery. Questions of casuistry submitted to the Synod. Advice given concerning the payment of taxes for the support of the Episcopal church. Application from Pennsylvania for sermon. Missionaries sent to America. Philosophical class at Abernethy. Act of the Synod concerning Arminianism. Outline of the Act. Mr Thomas Mair objects to some of the articles in it. Mr Mair charged with holding erroneous opinions. Dealings with Mr Mair. Mr Mair suspended from the exercise of his ministry. Deposed and excommunicated. Solemn warning published by the Synod. Extracts from it. Proposal to address the king on the state of religion. Proposal rejected. Mr Gib's remarks upon it. Overture to present a congratulatory address to George III. at his accession. Overture laid aside. Declaration of the Synod on the subject. Death of Mr Alexander Moncrieff. His character. His son Mr William Moncrieff elected Professor of Divinity. Missionary spirit of the Synod. Enactment on this subject. Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. Makes application to the Synod for assist-

ance in evangelizing the North American Indians. Application favourably received. Fund for support of widows. Liberality of the Synod's congregations.

If the state of affairs in the Establishment was bad, at the commencement of the Secession, it had become still worse at the period of the breach. The quarrels of the Seceders afforded a favourable opportunity to those who took the lead, in conducting the affairs of the General Assembly, to have regained their lost influence with the people ; and if their management had been characterised by ordinary prudence, they might at this period have given a check to the progress of the Secession, from which it would not speedily have recovered. For it is natural to suppose that the minds of many, who were previously disposed to regard with a favourable eye the conduct of the Seceders, must have been considerably soured by their contentions, during the long-continued discussions of the burgess-oath question, and by their treatment of one another after the separation had taken place. And that notwithstanding these proceedings the Secession should still have continued to prosper, multiplying rapidly the number of its congregations, and swelling its list by the addition of new adherents, shows how grievous the yoke of patronage must have been felt by the people, and how oppressive the treatment which they received from their ecclesiastical rulers, when they forsook the national church, bedecked as it was with so many lordly honours, and took shelter in the bosom of the Secession, even in the midst of its wranglings. Before entering upon the transactions of the General Associate Synod, it will be proper that I take a view of the state of matters in the Establishment at this period ; and after considering it, no surprise will be felt by any that the Secession should still have continued to prosper, in spite of the temporary injury which it sustained by the disruption of the Synod.

One effect, which the existence of the Secession had upon those who were connected with the Established Church, was, that it rendered them more determined than ever in

their opposition to the law of patronage. “ When the people saw,” says a late writer,* “ that they had a ready access to ministers of their own selection, in Seceding meetings, the opposition to presentees became more inveterate and unmanageable ; and it was soon found to be a matter of extreme difficulty and embarrassment, in the church courts, to decide between the patrons and the people, without sacrificing to either what, by one party at least, was held to be the constitutional law of the church, or of the state.” Previous to the passing of the unpopular act of 1732, and for some time after, a considerable portion of the clergy of the Church of Scotland contended for the right of the parishioners at large, or at least of the heads of families, to have a voice in the choosing of their ministers ; while there was a still larger portion, who maintained that the right of calling was limited to heritors and elders. None as yet had the hardihood to avow, that a call was not necessary to give effect to a presentation. Patronage, however, soon brought forth its proper fruits. By means of it, a class of men were introduced into the church, who, whatever might be their talents or literary attainments, were certainly most determined enemies of popular rights. The doctrine which they taught in the pulpit to the listless hearers, was a species of morality *sui generis* ; it could neither be called christian nor heathen, but was a compound of both : and their ecclesiastical administration was founded on the principle, not of redressing grievances, or remedying abuses, but of silencing complaints by mere dint of authority, and crushing by the strong arm of power all resistance to their arbitrary decrees. Instead of being servants to the church for Christ’s sake, they were “ lords over God’s heritage.”

This class, who styled themselves *the moderate party* (for what reason it is difficult to divine), were stern expounders of the law of patronage. According to their interpretation of it, a call was an unnecessary appendage to a presentation. Indeed the term *call* was gradually laid aside by them as obsolete, and in its room was substituted the more fashion-

* Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, Bart.

able word *concurrence*. But whether there was a call or concurrence, or not, the people were obliged to submit to the hirelings thrust in upon them by the patrons. The principle which the party avowed, and which they ultimately succeeded in establishing, was, that a presentation to a benefice was in all cases to be made effectual, “without any reservation founded on the merits of the call, or on the number of heritors, elders, or parishioners, who concurred or dissented.”* This beautiful system of settling ministers, in vacant parishes, without any regard to the wishes or opposition of the people, was not brought to a state of perfection all at once. It was not till Dr William Robertson, the celebrated historian, succeeded to the chief management of church affairs, in 1763, that it received the finishing touch. During the time that he swayed the sceptre in the General Assembly, the struggles with the people were incessant, and the opposition to the presentees was of such a determined kind, that the time of the Assembly was almost wholly occupied with business of this description; and some of the settlements in dispute were protracted for eight or ten years.† He finally succeeded, however, in establishing the doctrine, that a call was not necessary to effect a settlement; and the people, finding, from dear-bought experience, that their applications for relief to the Assembly were almost uniformly unsuccessful, at last gave up the contest as hopeless.

“The language of the majority in Assemblies, at this time,” says the writer already quoted, “universally was, that the secession from the church, instead of increasing, was on the decline; and that the superior character and talents of the established clergy were gradually weakening its resources, and would ultimately exhaust them. Experience has not verified these sanguine expectations. At the distance of a few years after Dr Robertson retired, the people, disgusted with unsuccessful processes before the Assembly, relinquished the plan of their predecessors, and

* Appendix to Life of Dr Erskine, by Sir H. Moncrieff Wellwood, Bart., p. 464.

† Ibid, p. 465.

came seldom to the Assembly with appeals from the sentences of the inferior courts, appointing the settlement of presentees whom they resisted. But they began to do more quietly, or with less observation, than formerly, what was not less unfriendly to the establishment. In ordinary cases, they now leave the church courts to execute their sentences without opposition, and set themselves immediately to rear a meeting-house, which very frequently carries off a large portion of the inhabitants of the parish. The bustle in Assemblies is in a great measure over, or a disputed settlement no longer creates any serious interest or division in the church courts. But the silent increase of seceding meetings has gradually weakened and contracted the influence of the establishment on the general population."

At the period of the breach in the Secession Synod, matters had not yet reached this crisis in the Established Church, but they were hastening rapidly onward to it. From 1740 to 1760, that portion of the clergy who contended for the right of the people to choose their pastors, were fast disappearing from the stage, and their places were as fast filling up by persons of the sentiments above described. Parties in the General Assembly thus gradually underwent a change to the worse. Instead of contending for the right of the people to choose their ministers, the *popular party* took up the ground formerly occupied by the moderates, and contended for nothing more than that a call from the heritors and elders was necessary to constitute the foundation of the pastoral relation. The *moderate party*, on the other hand, contended, that though it was desirable, for the sake of encouraging the presentee, to obtain a call or *concurrence* from as many of the heritors and elders, and other parishioners, as chose to subscribe one, yet even this formality was not necessary. In so far as the people were concerned, it was a matter of indifference which of these two parties had the ascendancy; for the doctrine of the one interfered as much with their christian liberty as the doctrine of the other. Indeed, the difference betwixt the two was in a

great measure nominal. Those who contended for the necessity of a call from the heritors and elders, found no difficulty in giving effect, by means of the influence of patrons and of non-resident heritors, to the most unpopular presentations; and, in point of fact, the number of *violent settlements* was not less, when the doctrine of the one party was acted upon, than when the doctrine of the other came to be the acknowledged law.* Such a state of things as this, in the Established Church, could not but be exceedingly favourable to the Secession.

Very soon after the breach had taken place in the Associate Synod, the Assembly altered their mode of appointing committees to carry into effect their unrighteous decisions, in cases where the presbytery refused to take any part in ordaining a presentee, in opposition to the avowed wishes of the people. For upwards of twenty years, “riding committees” (as they were termed), composed of ministers whose consciences did not trouble them much upon the subject, had been appointed to perform this disagreeable service; and those members of presbytery whose conscientious scruples did not permit them to be present at the ordination of a minister in such circumstances, were exempted from attending. This indulgence it was resolved no longer to grant. In 1750, a reference was made by the Assembly to their Commission, “to consider of a method for securing the execution of the sentences of the Assembly and Commission, and to prepare an overture thereanent to be laid before next General Assembly; and, in case presbyteries shall be disobedient to any of the sentences of this Assembly, in the particular causes which have been determined by them, the General Assembly empowers their Commission to call such presbyteries before them, and censure them as they shall see cause.”†

After this period, presbyteries were authoritatively required to carry into effect the decisions of the supreme court, however offensive they might be to the people, or

* Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine, p. 462.

† Acts of Assembly, 1750.

whatever scruples they themselves might have as to the justice of them. The doctrine of non-resistance and of passive obedience was never carried to a higher pitch, by any despot, or by any society of men, than it was, at this time, by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This despotic exercise of ecclesiastical authority excited disgust both in ministers and people; and the attempts which were speedily made to compel refractory presbyteries to yield compliance, considerably swelled the ranks of the Seceders; and, in addition to this, gave birth, ere long, to a new class of separatists.

The first case of disobedience that came under the review of the Assembly, was that of the presbytery of Linlithgow, against whom a complaint was brought by Lord Torphichen, the patron, and other heritors of the parish of Torphichen, that they refused to execute a sentence of the last General Assembly, appointing them to ordain and admit Mr James Watson, as minister of that parish. After a long discussion, the Assembly resolved that the presbytery should be censured for their conduct. From this decision, the Reverend Principal Wishart, with twenty-one ministers and one elder, dissented; and, when they gave in their reasons of dissent, they craved that they might be read, and recorded. This the Assembly would not permit, but ordered the paper to lie *in retentis*.* The presbytery having appeared at the bar, and been solemnly rebuked, were enjoined, in concurrence with a committee named, to meet at the church of Torphichen, on a day appointed by the Assembly, and then and there ordain and admit Mr Watson as minister of the parish; and, should the presbytery fail again in their duty, by not being present at the meeting, the committee was ordered to proceed to the ordination without them. This was the last instance of a committee being appointed by the Assembly, for such a purpose.

In the course of the same year (1751) a similar case of disobedience occurred, which, on account of its affording a

* Struthers' Hist. of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 576.

fair specimen of the mode of government that prevailed in the national church at that period, and on account of the important consequences that resulted from it, deserves to be specially noticed. Mr Andrew Richardson having received a presentation to the church and parish of Inverkeithing, a strong opposition was made to him by the people ; and the case being brought before the Commission that met in the month of November, the presbytery of Dunfermline were peremptorily enjoined to proceed with his settlement. The presbytery refused to comply, and the case was again brought before the Commission by complaint at their next meeting. It was moved that the presbytery should be censured for their conduct, but the motion did not carry. The Commission then appointed the synod of Fife to ordain Mr Richardson before the beginning of May, and to report their diligence to the next General Assembly. The synod were equally refractory with the presbytery ; and when the Assembly met in May 1752, a complaint was lodged against both the synod and the presbytery, for refusing to execute the sentence of the Commission. Certain dissentients also, among whom were Messrs William Robertson, Hugh Blair, John Home, &c., brought a complaint against the Commission, because they had acquitted the presbytery when they ought to have censured it.

The Assembly took up this business with great keenness. They found " that the Commission in March had exceeded their powers, and had not done what they were bound to do, conform to the powers given them by the last Assembly." They appointed the presbytery of Dunfermline to meet at Inverkeithing on Thursday forenoon that same week, at eleven o'clock, to ordain Mr Richardson minister of that parish. All the members of presbytery were ordered to attend ; and, instead of the legal quorum *three*, it was declared that *five* should be the quorum on that occasion. A special summons was issued to all the ministers, to appear at the bar of the Assembly on Friday forenoon, to give an account of their conduct in this matter.

When the presbytery gave in their report, it was found that only three ministers had attended at Inverkeithing on the day appointed; and not being a sufficient quorum, they were obliged to separate without executing the work assigned them. Those who had absented themselves being called upon to state their reasons why they had not fulfilled the appointment of the Assembly, various apologies for absence were given by different individuals, which were sustained as valid. The following ministers pled conscientious scruples as the reason why they had not attended, viz. Messrs Robert Stark, Torryburn; David Hunter, Saline; Alexander Daling, Cleish; John Spence, Orwell; Thomas Gillespie, Carnock; and Thomas Fernie, Dunfermline. These six gave in a written representation to the Assembly, the tenor whereof follows:—"To the very Reverend the Moderator, &c. of the Church of Scotland, met at Edinburgh 1752, the humble representation of the members of the presbytery of Dunfermline, whose names are hereunto subjoined. We cannot but be deeply affected with our present situation, in being obliged to stand at the bar of this venerable Assembly to answer for non-compliance with any of their appointments; but as this court is so good as to allow us to speak in our behalf, we shall therefore beg leave humbly to represent some of those things which have all along straitened us in the execution of the orders we received, and which still lay such difficulties in our way, as we are not able to surmount. And this we hope to do with that plainness and honesty, and at the same time with that dutiful respect to the supreme judicatory of this church, which it is so justly entitled to expect from us. We need scarcely observe how unjustly we have been represented as having no other difficulty but the unreasonable fear of opposing the ill-grounded prejudices of our people; nor need we inform this house, that ever since the act restoring patronages in the end of Queen Anne's reign, there has been a vehement opposition to all settlements by presentations where there was but small concurrence, which settlements have already produced a train of

the most unhappy consequences, greatly affecting the interest of religion, and if turned into the stated and fixed rule of procedure, will, in all probability, be attended with every fatal effect. Now, under such a view and apprehension as this, was it any wonder, or was it inconsistent with that obedience which we owe to our earthly superiors in the land, that we should demur and stop short in carrying a settlement into execution, where, in our apprehension, there was by no means such a concurrence of persons residing in the parish, as might give sufficient weight and influence for promoting the great ends of the ministry. The Assembly know well, that it appears from their own acts and resolutions entered into their records, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this church, not to say as inconsistent with our Union settlement; and we find it declared, act, 25th of May, 1736, that it is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation; and therefore it is seriously recommended, by the said act, to all judicatories of this church, to have a due regard to the said principle in planting vacant congregations, so as none to be intruded into such parishes, as they regard the glory of God, and the edification of the body of Christ; which recommendation we humbly apprehend to be strongly supported by the principles of reason, and the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ. Permit us to inform the Assembly, that, after repeated endeavours used by committees of the presbytery, to lessen the opposition to Mr Richardson, in the parish of Inverkeithing, matters still remain in such a situation, that we are brought to that unhappy dilemma, either of coming under the imputation of disobedience to a particular order of our ecclesiastical superiors, or contributing our part to the establishment of measures, which we can neither reconcile with the declared principles, nor with the true interest of this church. On the whole, we cannot help thinking, that, by having an active hand in carrying Mr Richardson's settlement into execution,

we should be the unhappy instruments, as matters now stand, to speak in the language of holy writ, of scattering the flock of Christ, not to mention what might be the fatal consequences of such settlements to our happy civil constitution. If the venerable Assembly shall, on this account, judge us guilty of such criminal disobedience as to deserve their censure, we trust they will at least allow we acted as honest men, willing to forego every secular advantage for conscience' sake. In such an event, this, through grace, shall be our support, that, not being charged with any neglect of the duties of our ministry among those committed to our care, we are to suffer for adhering to what we apprehend to be the will of our great Lord and Master, whose we are, whom we are bound to serve in all things, and on whom we cast all our care."*

This representation had no effect in mitigating the resentment of the Assembly. After it was read, the moderator exhorted the six brethren seriously to consider the situation in which they stood, and to avail themselves of the opportunity now presented of averting the displeasure of the church. They were then asked, one by one, if they had any thing further to offer in their own vindication, when they replied, that they had nothing to add to the representation already given in. The brethren being removed, the Assembly caused read over again their representation; after which they proceeded to deliberate, what censure it would be proper to inflict. It was moved that one of the six brethren be deposed. This motion, after long reasoning, was carried by a considerable majority. Intimation was given to the brethren of this sentence, and they were ordered to attend next day. On the following day (May 23), the Assembly resumed the consideration of this business; and all the brethren having an opportunity given them of again delivering their sentiments, they adhered to their former declaration. The vote was then stated which of the six should be deposed. A large proportion of the Assembly

* Acts of Assembly 1752.

declined giving any vote. Out of fifty-six persons who voted on the occasion, fifty-two voted for the deposition of Mr Gillespie: And the moderator of the Assembly proceeded, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole king and head of the church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by him to them to depose Mr Thomas Gillespie, minister at Carnock, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging him to exercise the same, or any part thereof, within this church, in all time coming. And the Assembly did, and hereby do declare the church and parish of Carnock vacant from and after the day and date of this sentence."* Mr Gillespie stood at the bar, while the moderator pronounced upon him this sentence. The following reply, given by Mr Gillespie on receiving the sentence, is worthy of being recorded:—"Moderator, I desire to receive this sentence of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland with real concern, and awful impressions of the divine conduct in it; but I rejoice that to me it is given, in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

The Assembly took credit to themselves for leniency, in not inflicting a similar sentence upon the other five brethren. They resolved, however, to put their obedience to a still farther test; for they remitted it to the presbytery to proceed with the ordination of Mr Richardson, on or before the 18th of June. They ordered a correct list of the ministers who should be present to be made up and entered into the minutes of the presbytery, together with the excuses of those who should be absent. The synod of Fife were enjoined to consider these excuses at their first meeting after the admission, and to sustain or reject the same; and the Assembly declared every member of presbytery who should be absent on the day appointed, and whose excuse should not be sustained by the synod, to be suspended from the exercise of their office in all presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies, "ay and until they shall respectively testify their sorrow for their disobedience to the acts and ordinances

* Acts of Assembly, 1752.

of the General Assembly, either to their own presbytery or synod, or to any Assembly or Commission thereof." This sentence of suspension was afterwards applied to three of the ministers above mentioned, viz. Mr David Hunter, Saline ; Mr Alexander Daling, Cleish ; and Mr John Spence, Orwell.

In the following year, a petition was presented to the Assembly from certain heritors, elders, and heads of families in the parish of Carnock, and another from the presbytery of Dunfermline, praying that the sentence of suspension might be removed from these three brethren, as also the sentence of deposition from Mr Gillespie. But the Assembly refused to grant the prayer of these petitions, on the ground that no application had been made by the individuals themselves to have their sentences removed. Mr Gillespie continued to exercise his ministerial functions, notwithstanding his sentence of deposition. He preached for several months in the fields at Carnock, until a place of worship was provided for him by his friends, in the town of Dunfermline ; and, a few years afterward, he and two other ministers constituted themselves into a presbytery, under the title of the " Presbytery of Relief."

Such tyrannical proceedings as these, continued year after year, could not but create disgust and disaffection among the best friends of the national church ; and no wonder that many of her most intelligent and pious members fled from her communion, and joined the ranks of the Secession, where, amid the strife that unhappily prevailed at this period, they found the gospel preached in its purity, and a strict regard paid to the rights and privileges of the people.

While the dignitaries of the Establishment were thus busily engaged in converting the Scottish parishes into moral deserts, by forcing, at the point of the bayonet, the settlement of hirelings, whom the people indignantly spurned from them, they most inopportunately chose this period, for making an application to government to have their livings increased. Though such an application was probably not in itself unreasonable, as the greater part of the stipends

throughout Scotland appear; at this time, to have been very inadequate, yet the keenness which they showed in pushing the application, when contrasted with their indifference to the spiritual interests of the people, told much to their disadvantage. Besides, the project of an "augmentation" is at all times an unpopular one, and has seldom failed to excite opposition, even when broached in the most favourable circumstances. There are few things with regard to which men in general are more sensitive, than when an appeal is made to their purses. This will often kindle a flame of indignation when nothing else is capable of doing it. So happened it in the present instance. So long as the ruling party in the venerable Assembly did nothing more than turn a deaf ear to the humble petitions of their flocks, ordain, by force of arms, intruders over reclaiming congregations, and depose godly ministers for acting an honest and a conscientious part; so long as the ecclesiastical rulers committed such venial faults as these, the landed proprietors of Scotland were quiescent. Nay, they smiled assent to these proceedings, and considered that they were upholding the dignity of the crown when they lent all their influence to carry into effect the law of patronage. But when a motion was brought forward in the Assembly, in 1750, to make an application to government to get "the livings" increased, a great outcry was raised against the clergy, by those very men who had hitherto been their chief supporters, in trampling under foot the privileges of the people. Many of the Scottish counties passed strong resolutions upon the subject, condemnatory of the avarice and selfishness of the ministers. A standing committee, consisting of noblemen and gentlemen, was appointed at Edinburgh, to watch over the progress of this affair, and to oppose, by every legal method, the application of the Assembly. His Majesty's Commissioner deemed the matter of such importance as to take notice of it in his speech, when dissolving the Assembly, and he warned them of the risk they incurred of losing all, by grasping at too much.

Those, however, who guided the movements of the church, were not deterred by this mighty stir, on the part of the landed interest, from prosecuting their object. Commissioners were despatched to London to petition his Majesty, and the two houses of Parliament, for relief; but, after dancing attendance on those in power, for several months, they were obliged to return, without accomplishing their errand. The royal ear was shut against them, and no relief from Parliament could be obtained. But the journey, though unsuccessful as to the main object of it, was not altogether lost. One useful lesson was taught by it to those who occupied the high places in the Scottish church, and that was a lesson of humility. They learned from the experiment which they had been making, that though they might do with the people what they pleased, yet they could not, with all their boasted influence, obtain from those on whose smiles they were dependent, an advance of the legal minimum of stipend, which, at this period, amounted to the vast sum of £44 : 8 : 10½ ! *

These proceedings of the national church increased the unpopularity, which it had already acquired by its disregard of the people's spiritual welfare, in enforcing among them violent settlements. That the Secession, notwithstanding the shock which it had sustained, should not merely exist, but continue to prosper, in these circumstances, was not at all wonderful. The measures adopted by the ecclesiastical judicatories of the Establishment were such as evinced the necessity of the Secession; and, at the same time, tended considerably to increase the number of its congregations. Having given this brief review of the state of affairs in the national church, at the period of the breach, I now proceed with the narrative of the General Associate Synod.

The following ministers and elders having met in the Reverend Adam Gib's house, Edinburgh, on the 10th April, 1747, declared that, by virtue of the protest which they had taken against the proceedings which led to the rupture, the

* Struther's History of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 572. Acts of Assembly, 1750.

powers of the Associate Synod were inherent in them : Of the presbytery of Dunfermline, Messrs James Thomson, Burntisland ; Alexander Moncrieff, Abernethy ; Thomas Mair, Orwell ; George Brown, Perth ; and William Campbell, Ceres, ministers ; with Alexander Lyal, from Burntisland ; William Henderson, from Abernethy ; David Donaldson, from Ceres ; Thomas Bogie, from Leslie ; and Thomas Drysdale, from Muckhart, ruling elders : Of the presbytery of Edinburgh, Messrs Adam Gib, Edinburgh ; Andrew Clarkson, Linlithgow ; Patrick Matthew, Midholm ; James Scot, Gateshaw ; John Whyte, Dunse ; George Murray, Annandale ; and Robert Archibald, Haddington, ministers ; with Andrew Graham, from Linlithgow ; Charles Scot from Midholm ; Walter Henderson, from Gateshaw ; John Wilson, from Dunse ; and James Johnstone, from Annandale, ruling elders : Of the presbytery of Glasgow, Patrick Edmond, ruling elder, from Balfron. The following ministers, who were not present at this meeting, afterward declared their adherence to the Synod, as thus constituted,—Messrs William Mair, Muckhart ; John Cleland, Balfron ; Andrew Arrot, Dunnichen ; David Smyton, Kilmaurs ; John Erskine, Leslie ; Andrew Thomson, Mearns ; and Isaac Paton, Templepatrick in Ireland.*

The chief business of the Synod, at several of its meetings, referred to matters connected with the breach, of which an account has already been given. Other matters, besides these, occupied at the same time their attention. At their meeting in November, 1747, it was resolved to resume the proceedings against Mr Nairn, which had been suspended by the disputes respecting the burgess-oath. A libel was prepared and put into his hand, and he was summoned to appear before the Synod, to answer to the following charges contained in it : That he was guilty of denying and impugning the present civil authority over these nations, and subjection thereunto in lawful commands : And, also, that he was guilty of a groundless and unwarrantable secession from

* Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 73.

the Associate Presbytery, now the Associate Synod, a lawfully constituted court of Christ. Mr Nairn, in answer to the summons which had been given him, appeared before the Synod, in the month of January following. After a speech, in which he declined the authority of the Synod, he read a long paper, vindicating his conduct on both the charges. He boldly denied, that subjection was due to the present civil government of this country, even in lawful commands; and his separation from the Presbytery he attempted to justify in language peculiarly offensive. He then renewed his declinature of the Synod's authority, and withdrew from the court; but, as he was removing, the moderator cited him *apud acta* to appear before them on the following day. Being called, next day, he did not appear. The Synod pronounced him contumacious, and found that the charges, if proven, were relevant to infer censure. No formal proof was necessary to substantiate the charges, as the truth of them was admitted by Mr Nairn. At a subsequent meeting he was deposed from the office of the ministry; and in February, 1750, the sentence of the greater excommunication was pronounced against him.

During the period that this process was going on, a novel scene occurred in the Synod. On the day that Mr Nairn read the paper already mentioned, one John Hastie, a painter, from Edinburgh, accompanied by two witnesses, Andrew Boa and Gavin Veitch, attempted to execute a summons in the name of the Reformed Presbytery,* against Mr James Thomson, moderator of the Synod, and all the members of it, charging them to appear before said Presbytery at Braehead, in the parish of Dalserf, on the 15th or 16th day of February next. Two papers were laid upon the Synod's table, purporting to be libels which the Synod were called upon by the Presbytery to answer. These papers were dated at Linktown of Arnot, formerly Abbotshall, December 31, 1747, and were subscribed by John Cuthbertson, moderator.

* Mr Nairn concurring with old Mr McMillan, had originated this Presbytery. Gib's Display, vol. ii. p. 115.

Inquiry being made, if any members of said Presbytery were present, two persons, George Brown and John Brackenrig, rose and avowed themselves belonging to it as elders. These, with one or two more, took open part with Mr Nairn, and joined in an obstreperous declaration of adherence to his declinature, thereby occasioning considerable disturbance in the Synod. The whole of them, with Messrs Alexander Marshall and John Cuthbertson, two ministers alleged to be present, were summoned by the moderator, *apud acta*, to appear before the Synod, on the following day. But none of them appearing, they were all found contumacious; and the Synod, after some deliberation, resolved to inflict censure upon them in conjunction with Mr Nairn. The following was the deliverance which the Synod pronounced upon the subject: “The Synod considering that Messrs Alexander Marshall and John Cuthbertson, with George Brown and John Brackenrig, members of that pretended presbytery, are espousing and propagating Mr Nairn’s sinful and pernicious principle and practice (concerning the present civil authority over these nations, and subjection thereunto in lawful commands), inasmuch as the said persons, in an article of their pretended libel, do impeach the members of the Synod, of wresting and perverting the Scripture, in the application they make of all those Scriptures, which are insisted on in defence of the Associate Presbytery’s principles, concerning the present civil government, and which are resumed on the first article of the libel against Mr Nairn: And considering that these persons by their presuming to frame and give out, or acknowledge the pretended libel foresaid, have most audaciously insulted the constitution and authority of a court of Christ, and the testimony for our covenanted reformation among their hands: And considering that John Hastie, Andrew Boa, Gavin Veitch, and Alexander Young, by their foresaid behaviour, were publicly sisting themselves under the standard of the foresaid sinful and pernicious principle and practice espoused and propagated by the foresaid members of the pretended Reformed Presbytery; and did concur in the foresaid auda-

cious insult : And considering that all the persons above mentioned have thus audaciously intruded themselves upon this Synod ; and laid a sufficient foundation for the Synod's taking cognizance of their case and behaviour : And considering that by the behaviour of these persons respectively, the great name, honour, and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the lawful courts of his own spiritual kingdom, as also his cause and testimony, in opposition to the apostacy and provocations of the present generation in these lands, have been rudely attacked, dishonoured, and profaned :—solemnly *Depose*, on these grounds, the said Mr Alexander Marshall, and Mr John Cuthbertson, from the office of the holy ministry, and the said George Brown and John Brackenrig, from the office of ruling elders ; and at the same time lay these four persons, together with John Hastie, Andrew Boa, Gavin Veitch, and Alexander Young, under the sentence of the lesser excommunication.”

The pronouncing of such a sentence on individuals, who did not acknowledge the authority of the Synod, and who had never professed subjection to it, was considered by many as an undue stretch of church censure. Though the conduct of these persons was foolish and unbrotherly, yet the Synod would have acted a much more dignified part, if they had passed it over in silence. Soon after these proceedings, Mr Nairn left his new connexion and returned to the communion of the Established Church, into which he was not received, without making the most humiliating confessions of sorrow for having left it.*

* The following account of what took place in the presbytery of Kirkaldy, when Mr Nairn appeared before it, for the purpose of making his acknowledgments, has been received from one who was present, and who was an ear-witness of the following amusing colloquy. Moderator. “ Why did you commit the disorder of leaving the communion of the church ? ” Mr Nairn. “ I thought her chargeable with various corruptions.” Moderator. “ But are we better now, brother ? ” Mr Nairn. “ I think you are.” Moderator. “ No, not one bit ; I rebuke you for having followed divisive courses from the Church of Scotland.” Whatever opinion may be entertained of the corruptions of the national church, at this period, my readers will admit that it contained at least *one honest moderator*.

Certain questions of casuistry were brought before the Synod for judgment, in March, 1752, by a reference from the Seceders in Ireland, in which they were joined by their brethren in England. The questions, concerning which the Synod were required to give an opinion, were, Whether it was right for the Seceders in those countries to take the constable-oath, and the church-warden oath, to qualify them for serving in these offices; How far it was proper for them to acknowledge the Bishops' courts, or take the benefit of them for the confirmation of testaments and other causes; also, Whether they were warranted in making the usual payments for the support of the Episcopal Church, by law established in those lands. The Synod were unanimously of opinion, that the people under their inspection, in England and Ireland, could not, consistently with a good conscience and without sin, take either of the foresaid oaths: because the constable-oath was too sweeping in its nature, requiring a general compliance with the laws of the land, in the execution of that office, without proper and necessary limitations; and the church-warden oath reduplicated upon certain articles, implying an approval of the observances of the Episcopal Church. They were no less decided in their opinion against their people acknowledging the Bishops' courts, or taking the benefit of them in any causes; as this, they said, implied "an homologating of an ecclesiastical constitution in those courts, with the civil places and power of kirkmen."

With regard to the payments which the Seceders were required to make, in common with the other subjects of England and Ireland, for the support of the Episcopal Church, the Synod, after mature deliberation, gave an affirmative judgment. They passed an act containing an explicit declaration of their sentiments on this subject, for the satisfaction of all concerned. In this act they declare, "That though the afore-mentioned payments are applied for the support of manifold corruptions and superstitions in those Episcopal churches, which we are essaying to testify against,

and which all ranks of people in these lands ought to be humbled for before the Lord, as being deep causes of his wrath against and controversy with them : Yet the Synod do not find a relevant ground for scruple of conscience about submitting to civil authority in the foresaid payments ; as if this could imply any homologation of the foresaid corruptions and superstitions, or of what application is made of those payments unto the support thereof, while the payers are openly engaged in a public testimony against the same, and are not suppressed in the maintenance of that testimony, but are protected in the exercise of their civil and religious liberties ; and the said payments are made only in compliance with the common order of society.”*

These sentiments of the Synod will scarcely stand the test of a rigid examination. Scripture and reason certainly require that subjects pay the taxes imposed on them by a legal authority, for the ordinary purposes of government ; and should any portion of these taxes be applied to an object of which the payers do not approve, this may be a good reason for remonstrating with government (provided the right of petitioning be enjoyed) on the misapplication of the money entrusted to them ; but it cannot furnish a valid excuse for withholding payment of the taxes altogether. For no government could be carried on, if each individual of the community were permitted to make his judgment or conscience the rule, according to which he either granted or withheld what was due by him to the public treasury. The case, however, assumes a different aspect, if a sum is levied annually for the avowed purpose of supporting a system of religion, which the payers consider to be corrupt and superstitious. If there be no “relevant ground for scruple of conscience,” in being compelled to contribute to the support of such a system, it will be difficult to find a case in which “scruple of conscience” ought to be pled at all. True, it does not imply any homologation, on our part, of a corrupt and superstitious sys-

* Act of Synod concerning church payments in England and Ireland. 1752.

tem of religion, when we are compelled by the strong arm of law to give it an involuntary support ; but conscience is not, on that account, the less aggrieved at our being obliged to maintain a system of religion, which we believe to be opposed to the word of God, and ruinous to the souls of men. Neither does it mend the matter, to tell the persons who are thus aggrieved, that they are at liberty to testify against the corruptions and superstitions, for the maintenance of which they are obliged to pay ; and that they ought to have no scruple of conscience about the payments which are thus exacted of them, because “said payments are made only in compliance with the common order of society.” If this be a proper salvo to the consciences of those who are required to contribute to the support of a religion which they believe to be false, the same reasons will hold equally good with regard to the payment of money, levied avowedly for the purpose of extirpating religion altogether. Should conscientious persons object to the payment of a tax imposed for such a nefarious purpose, and should they plead that it is an infringement of the rights of conscience to require them to pay it, the answer to them would be, “There is no relevant ground for scruple of conscience in the matter : you are at liberty to testify against the wickedness of imposing such a tax, and the payment of it is made only in compliance with the common order of society.” How far it may be right for persons to resist the payment of money demanded of them, in the name of the law, for the support of a religion of which they do not approve, is a question for lawyers to determine. Were justice permitted to decide, the question would speedily be settled. But that the rights of conscience are violated, and religious liberty infringed, by the imposition of a law which subjects one portion of the community to be deprived of their goods, for maintaining the religion of another portion, however corrupt and objectionable it may be, is a point which few will controvert, except those who are blinded by self-interest, or hurried away by the zeal of partisanship.

At the meeting of Synod in August, 1751, an urgent ap-

plication was made to them from Mr Alexander Craighead, minister at Middle Octarara, in Pennsylvania, and from a number of persons in that province, earnestly beseeching that the Synod would appoint some ministers to labour in that part of America. The application was favourably received, and it was resolved, that measures should be immediately adopted with a view to a transatlantic mission. They appointed the Presbytery of Ireland* to ordain Mr James Hume, and to send him as a missionary to Pennsylvania; and Mr John Jamieson, student, was ordered to be licensed by the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline, that he might be in readiness, if the Synod should see fit, at their next meeting, to appoint him to be ordained, and sent upon a similar errand. The intentions of the Synod, in reference to the Pennsylvanian mission, were for a short while frustrated by these two preachers receiving calls from congregations at home. Mr Hume was called by the associate congregation of Moyrah and Lisburn, in Ireland; and though the Synod refused to sustain the call, and ordered Mr Hume to proceed on his mission, yet he assigned a variety of reasons for refusing compliance with his appointment; so that they were ultimately obliged to relieve him from it; and he was left at the disposal of the presbytery, that, after suitable acknowledgments had been made by him for his obstinacy, they might ordain him over the congregation by whom he had been called. Mr Jamieson also was prevented from undertaking his mission, by a call which he received from a congregation in Glasgow. The Synod listened to the excuses which were offered on his behalf, and kept him at home.

In consequence of these disappointments, and the reluctance expressed by young men to undertake missions to distant countries, the Synod enacted (August, 1752), that

* This presbytery, being the first Secession presbytery in Ireland, was formed in 1750-1, and, at its formation, consisted of the following ministers, with their respective elders:—Messrs Isaac Paton, Templepatrick; David Arrott, Markethill; John Tennant, Roseyards and Bellershean; and Alexander Stewart, Newton.

presbyteries, previous to their entering students on trials for licence, should require them to signify their willingness to submit to any missionary appointment that might be given them by the church courts, unless they had such objections to offer as should be found relevant ; and those young men who showed an aversion to submit, were no longer to be acknowledged in the capacity of students. Soon after the passing of this act, a renewed application was made to the Synod, from a number of the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, for missionaries to be sent to that quarter. Messrs Alexander Gellatly and Andrew Bunyan were ordered to be licensed without delay, that they might be set apart to this important work. After Mr Bunyan had received licence from the Edinburgh presbytery, some demur took place in his mind about his undertaking the proposed mission. Difficulties, connected with his particular situation, were stated by him, the relevancy of which was referred by the presbytery to the judgment of the Synod. When the proposed objections were laid before the Synod, they were declared to be irrelevant, and to afford no sufficient ground for relieving Mr Bunyan from his engagement, and he was required to proceed with his trials for ordination. Mr Bunyan's "want of clearness" still remained. The Synod were peremptory ; and after several ineffectual attempts were made to remove his difficulties, they deprived him of his licence, for refusing to fulfil his missionary appointment. This measure was a strong one. By some it will be pronounced harsh and unjustifiable. But the Synod considered, that as Mr Bunyan had received licence on the faith of his being willing to go upon a distant mission, so he had justly forfeited it by refusing to fulfil his engagement. Besides, the call from Pennsylvania for labourers to be sent into that portion of the vineyard, was loud and urgent ; and if Mr Bunyan's conduct had been permitted to pass without a strong expression of the Synod's displeasure, so soon after the passing of the act above mentioned, it would have furnished a bad precedent with regard to future licentiates, and might have had

the effect of preventing the Synod from engaging in any missionary enterprise whatever. The lesson was not lost upon Mr Bunyan himself ; for soon after this, he appeared before the Synod ; acknowledged that he had given just ground of offence by his past conduct ; received a suitable admonition from the moderator ; expressed his willingness to be at the disposal of the Synod, with regard to any future mission they might appoint to Pennsylvannia, or to any other part of the vineyard ; and having made these acknowledgments, his licence was again restored. The honour, however, of carrying the banner of the cross, in connexion with the Secession Church, across the waves of the Atlantic, was an honour in which he was not permitted to share.

Mr Gellatly, having been licensed and ordained, was ordered to proceed by the first opportunity to Pennsylvania ; and the Synod appointed one of their own members, Mr Andrew Arnot, minister at Midholm, to accompany him and labour in that province for the space of a year, leaving it to himself either to return home, at the end of that period, or to remain, as he might feel inclined. The instructions given to these two brethren, by the Synod, were, that on their arrival in Pennsylvania, they should constitute themselves into a presbytery, along with two elders, under the title of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania ; that they should endeavour to form, as soon as possible, two congregations, with distinct elderships ; that both sessions should choose representatives for the Presbytery ; and that none should be ordained or admitted as elders, except such as have perused and approve of the standards of the Secession Church, besides being possessed of the other qualifications required by the Holy Scriptures. These two brethren set sail for their destination in the beginning of summer, 1753 ; and in the year following, Mr James Proudfoot, licentiate, was appointed to the same honourable work, that he might supply the place of Mr Arnot, who had intimated his intention of returning home. He was ordained by the presbytery of Dunfermline, in July ; and sailed from Greenock for Pennsylvania, in the beginning of August. To

defray the expense connected with this mission, the Synod enjoined a general collection to be made in all the congregations, under their inspection. This was done for two successive years ; and the result was, that upwards of one hundred pounds were collected for this object ; a sum highly creditable to the liberality and piety of the association, when the fewness of the congregations at this time belonging to it, and the general poverty of the members are taken into the account ; and when it is farther considered, that every year a collection was made for giving pecuniary assistance to students in the prosecution of their studies.

The philosophical class was still continued at Abernethy, in connexion with the Divinity Hall. A temporary interruption was given to it, by the events connected with the breach. But soon after that period, Mr John Heugh was appointed to take the charge of it, and after he was ordained at Stirling, he was succeeded by Mr William Graham. It was not rendered imperative on the young men to attend the philosophical class at Abernethy, for many were admitted to the study of divinity, direct from the classes of the university : but the object for which this class was instituted, was to afford to those who desired it, an opportunity of studying the various branches of philosophy in a school, where they would not be exposed to the danger of having their principles contaminated. When any student applied for admission into this class, with a view to the study of divinity, he was subjected to a strict examination by the presbytery, in his knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages ; he was also questioned closely as to his soundness in the faith, and his experimental acquaintance with religion. A committee was appointed from time to time, by the Synod, to examine the philosophical class ; and, according to the report given by this committee, were the students declared to be qualified to enter upon the study of divinity, or not.

At this period, the attention of the Synod was directed to the arminian doctrine of universal redemption, by an overture laid before them from the presbytery of Edinburgh. In

this overture, the presbytery represented it as “ a matter of public notoriety, that the arminian scheme of universal atonement and redemption, as to purchase, was lately revived and industriously promoted, in somewhat of a new and ensnaring form ; and that this new flood of error, whereby the system of gospel-doctrine is very widely and perniciously attacked, did more and more threaten to overthrow the faith of some.” They therefore proposed to the Synod, “ that they might consider upon a proper course to be taken, for guarding the people under their inspection, and particularly their candidates for the holy ministry, against the imminent danger from the said revival of arminianism ; and more especially that they might turn the point of gospel truth against the chief branches of this new mode of arminianism, by asserting particularly the opposite doctrines of the Lord’s word, which are contained in our Confession of Faith, and Catechisms,” &c. This overture further embodied in it seven articles, in the form of particular assertions of gospel truth ; and, in conclusion, it was moved, “ That the Synod should assert these foregoing or like articles, with a general condemnation and rejection of all contrary errors, or of all tenets and opinions which are opposite unto, or inconsistent with, the said articles of gospel truth ; and with a general warning to all the people under their inspection, to beware of entertaining any contrary doctrines, particularly as they might find the same vented in any books or pamphlets which they get into their hands.”

The Synod entered upon the consideration of this overture in April 1754. They agreed to wave any particular examination of what was set forth in the preamble, concerning a late revival of arminianism in the article of universal redemption, with the imminent danger therefrom : But they also agreed in apprehending such a danger of that kind, as made it requisite and necessary for them to proceed upon the articles proposed in the overture. Having considered, *seriatim*, these articles, at several sederunts, they were, with certain amendments, approved of ; and were soon after publish-

ed under the following title, *Act of the Associate Synod, containing an assertion of some gospel truths, in opposition to arminian errors upon the head of universal redemption.*

The following is an outline of the articles exhibited in this act. In it the Synod assert and declare,—

1. That in the covenant of grace our Lord Jesus Christ became the federal head and representative of those only among mankind sinners, whom God hath out of his mere good pleasure from all eternity elected unto everlasting life ; and for them only he was made an undertaking surety.

2. That our Lord Jesus Christ hath redeemed none others, by his death, but the elect only ; because for them only he was made under the law, made sin, and made a curse ; being substituted only in their room and stead, and having only their iniquities laid upon him, or imputed unto him ; so that he did bear only their sins ; for their sins only he laid down his life, and was crucified.

3. That there is but one special redemption, by the death of Christ, for all the objects thereof ; as he died in one and the same respect, for all those for whom in any respect he died.

4. That the intercession of Christ is infallibly of the same extent, in respect of its objects, with the atonement and satisfaction made in his death : So that he actually and effectually makes intercession for all those for whom he laid down his life, or for whom he purchased redemption, that it may be fully applied to them in due time.

5. That the death of Christ, as it is stated in the covenant of grace, hath a necessary, inseparable, certain, and infallible connexion with, and efficacy for the actual and complete salvation of all those for whom he died : So that redemption is certainly applied and effectually communicated to all those for whom Christ purchased the same ; all in whose stead he died being, in due season, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and glorified.

6. That Christ and the benefits of his purchase cannot be divided ; neither can these benefits be divided, one from another : Wherefore we are made partakers of the redemption

purchased by Christ, or of the benefits procured by his death, only through the effectual application thereof to us by his Holy Spirit, working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

7. That whereas there is a general, free, and unlimited offer of Christ, and salvation through him, by the gospel, unto sinners of mankind as such (upon the foundation of the intrinsic sufficiency of the death of Christ, his relation of a kinsman-redeemer to mankind sinners as such, and the promise of eternal life through him to mankind sinners as such in the gospel), with an interposal of divine authority in the gospel call, immediately requiring all the hearers thereof to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, as he is freely offered to them in the gospel; and whereas all the hearers of the gospel are thus privileged with an equal, full, and immediate warrant to make a particular application of Christ, with all his redemption and salvation, severally unto themselves, by a true and lively faith: So the gospel offer and call, containing the warrant of faith, cannot require or infer any universal atonement or redemption as to purchase; but are altogether consistent with and conformed unto the Scripture doctrine of particular redemption, which is expressed in the six preceding articles.

While the several articles of this act were under deliberation, Mr Thomas Mair of Orwell made opposition to some of them. He expressed some doubts about the second, fourth, and fifth articles; he voted against the sixth, and expressed a dissatisfaction with the general conclusion of the act. At the next meeting of Synod in August, he gave in a paper of dissent, in which he found no particular fault with the act, in any of its articles: But the dissent was specially founded on its being “evident and declared, that the Synod had framed their act in opposition to Mr Fraser’s (of Brae) treatise on the grounds of faith; and particularly what he delivers therein concerning the extent of the death of Christ, and his purchase of common benefits.”* The consideration

* Gib’s Display, vol. ii. p. 142.

of this paper was delayed by the Synod till their meeting in March 1755, when it was unanimously rejected, on the ground that it contained no reasons affecting any one article of doctrine asserted in said act.

Mr Mair, not satisfied with this decision, presented at the same meeting another paper, containing reasons of dissent, which the Synod found to be equally vague and unsatisfactory with the one already rejected. In this paper Mr Mair expressed a general dissatisfaction with the first five articles, complexly considered, while he stated no particular objection to the doctrine contained in any one of them, except the second. The Synod dealt with him to be more explicit; to state in plain and positive terms, in what respects he differed from his brethren, with regard to the first, third, fourth, and fifth articles, and to give a categorical answer to the question, "In what sense he maintained that Christ died for all and every one of mankind sinners." They further urged him to withdraw his paper, and to refrain from uttering opinions inconsistent with the articles of doctrine contained in the act which the Synod had sanctioned. Mr Mair, however, would neither give an explicit statement of his sentiments, nor would he retract his paper. With the view of bringing the matter to an issue, Mr Alexander Moncrieff presented a paper containing seven distinct positions, as expressive of the sentiments held by Mr Mair (so far as these could be ascertained from his papers and speeches), in opposition to the Synod: and he protested, "That these shall be taken and reputed as the tenets and opinions, which the Rev. Mr Mair is holding against the several articles in the foresaid act of Synod, in so far as he shall not forthwith refuse the same, with a plain and positive declaration of what else it is that he really holds, in the place of each particular which he shall refuse;" And he craved, that Mr Mair be required forthwith to answer.

The Synod, after some deliberation, adopted this proposal of Mr Moncrieff. They agreed, that Mr Mair be required to withdraw his paper of dissent; and if he shall refuse to

do so, that he be required to explain himself, in clear and positive terms, upon the several articles contained in Mr Moncrieff's protest, with certification that the Synod shall reckon those articles to be the tenets which he holds, in opposition to the Synod's act, in so far as he shall not state, in plain and positive terms, what else he holds in opposition thereto. Mr Mair craved that he might be furnished with a copy of Mr Moncrieff's paper, and that he might be allowed time to consider the different positions which it contained. On the following day, he was asked, if he was willing to withdraw his paper of dissent, to which he replied in the negative. He was then required to state his sentiments concerning the objectionable positions ascribed to him by Mr Moncrieff; and the positions being read, one by one, by the clerk, Mr Mair read a paper containing a separate answer to each. But the answers which he returned were pronounced to be altogether unsatisfactory, inasmuch as he neither expressly refused nor acknowledged the obnoxious opinions ascribed to him. The Synod, after having unsuccessfully urged him to be more explicit, appointed a committee to prepare an overture upon the subject.

At a subsequent sederunt, this committee reported, that Mr Mair's paper of dissent contained, amongst other things, the following sentiments:—"That besides the special objective destination and intention of our Lord's death, respecting the elect, there was some kind of general or universal objective destination and intention thereof, in the transactions of the new covenant: That in some sense Christ was made sin for all the hearers of the gospel, and made satisfaction for the sins of all those to whom he is exhibited by the gospel; yea, that in some sense Christ died for all mankind, or shed his blood for them, making a full payment of their debt, and a satisfaction to justice for their guilt, by some kind or manner of intention in his making satisfaction; And that this universal objective destination of the death of Christ, necessarily belongs to the ground upon which sinners may be invited to Christ, and necessarily belongs to the pleadable-

ness of Christ's satisfaction and righteousness, at the bar of law and justice ; so that the sinner's plea, to be proponed and sustained at the bar of law and justice, is a claim of right to Christ's blood, arising from the aforesaid universal objective destination ; and that an excluding all such concern in or claim to the death of Christ, as for the man in particular, until he believe, leaves no access for an applying faith : And that the purchase of Christ admits of a further and larger consideration, than is treated of in our standards."

When this extract was read in the presence of Mr Mair, he did not allege that any injustice was done to him or to his paper, in charging upon it such tenets. Whereupon, the Synod strictly prohibited him "from teaching or venting any tenets or opinions contrary to the articles of truth, asserted in the act of Synod dissented from ; and particularly from venting or teaching the above and such other tenets or opinions, which were evidently subversive of their received standards of doctrine." They also "appointed him to evidence his falling from the teaching or venting of those tenets and opinions, by withdrawing his paper of dissent against the next meeting of Synod ; with certification that, if he should persist in refusing to do so, the Synod would find themselves obliged to proceed to censure against him." When this sentence was intimated to Mr Mair, he replied, that he could not be bound up from teaching what he apprehended to be the truths of God.

At the next meeting of Synod, in August 1755, a long conference was held with Mr Mair, concerning the tenets advanced by him in his paper of dissent ; and the question being proposed to him, Whether he was willing to disavow these tenets and withdraw his paper,—he dictated the following answer to the clerk :—"That he had no freedom to fall from teaching those doctrines upon the matter, which are specified and condemned in the Synod's act, according to his view of them ; and that therefore he could not withdraw his dissent." The Synod desirous to show him all manner of indulgence, and anxious to have the grounds of difference re-

moved, proposed to him, " That if he was now in readiness to desire further time for considering upon the present affair, and an opportunity of further converse with a committee of Synod upon the subject, betwixt and their next meeting; and to submit, in the meantime, to the prohibition of the Synod's act concerning him, as to abstaining from teaching the opinions therein referred to, and keeping them to himself, if he cannot fall from them : That then the Synod should presently rest in appointing a committee for the said converse, and renewing the said prohibition." Mr Mair replied, " That he had not freedom to acquiesce in this proposal."

The Synod finding that farther lenity would be of no avail, resolved to adopt stronger measures to vindicate the truth. After some deliberation, they declared the several positions advanced by Mr Mair, in his paper of dissent, to be dangerous errors, subversive of those principles of gospel truth, laid down from the Holy Scriptures in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms : And because he refused to abstain from teaching those tenets, or to withdraw said paper, they suspended him from the exercise of his ministry, with certification that they would, at a future meeting, proceed to a higher censure, if he did not give satisfaction. Against this sentence Mr Mair entered his protest.

No farther steps were taken till the meeting of Synod, in August 1756. At that meeting, Mr Mair was found to be as obstinate as ever. He acknowledged that he had not obeyed the sentence of suspension ; and in his conference with the Synod, he maintained with great pertinacity, in addition to his former statements, the two following positions :—1. " That our Lord Jesus Christ died as a surety-priest, in some sense, for reprobates,—for Judas, as well as for Peter." 2. " That by his death he bought all mankind ; the elect as his bride, and the rest of the world as his tools, for the glory of God and the good of the elect." Though the Synod expressed their dissatisfaction with Mr Mair's present appearance, and declared that the two positions now advanc-

ed by him afforded additional grounds of censure ; yet they made another attempt to reclaim him from his error, before proceeding to the last extremity. They appointed a committee to meet and converse with him, from time to time, as they might find convenient, till next meeting of Synod ; and it was intimated to him, that, should his sentiments then remain unchanged, no farther delay would take place in subjecting him to a higher censure. Mr Mair expressed his willingness to meet with the committee ; but stated, that as the Synod had condemned the two positions now advanced by him, he protested against the condemnation thereof, for reasons to be given in due time.

When the Synod met in April 1757, long reasonings again took place with Mr Mair, which terminated, as usual, in his being more confirmed in his own opinions. Being asked, if he wished to have more time granted him, to re-examine his controverted tenets, with a view to retract the same, upon being convinced of the error contained in them, he answered in the negative, declaring, “ That he had no dubiety about his principles.” The Synod then, upon the grounds above stated, deposed him from the office of the holy ministry, and laid him under the sentence of the lesser excommunication. Mr Mair, on receiving this sentence, protested against it, and against the whole of the procedure in his case ; he also protested against the act, which had been passed in April, 1754, concerning doctrine, and in which the whole of these proceedings had originated.

“ The Synod,” says Mr Gib, “ was evidently forced to go forward, with great reluctance, in their proceedings against Mr Mair. Much time was spent upon tedious reasonings with him, at many sederunts, in all their meetings but one, through the course of three years ; with a frequent employing of brethren, all along, in turns of prayer, for divine light and pity. And though they were very desirous of his renouncing these new tenets which he had espoused, yet they never absolutely required this, as the only satisfaction in which they could acquiesce : While he all along seemed un-

ripe for being thus dealt with, by his labouring under a great confusion of thoughts upon the subject. But what they particularly and earnestly insisted for was, that he would keep such points to himself; or that he should drop his stated opposition to their act, and should fall from the venting of such erroneous notions among the people; of which they required no other evidence than withdrawing his paper of dissent: So that, in this way, they were willing to exercise forbearance with him. And when all such endeavours proved fruitless, they could not stop short of the issue which has been explained, without suffering the banner of gospel truth to fall among them.”*

The attention of the Synod having been directed, at a former meeting, to the extensive prevalence of wickedness amongst all classes, and to the threatening aspect of divine providence, as portending dreadful judgments to the country, a committee was appointed to take this matter into consideration, and to prepare a suitable address to the people on the subject. The result of the committee's labours was laid before the Synod, at their meeting in August, 1758, in the form of a pamphlet, and was entitled, *A Solemn Warning, by the Associate Synod in Scotland, addressed to persons of all ranks in Great Britain and Ireland: Wherein the great sin, danger, and duty of the present generation, in these lands, are pointed out and declared.* This “Warning,” after being revised and corrected by the Synod, was ordered to be immediately published. If we are to judge of the state of religion, throughout the British dominions at this period, from the statements contained in this document, it must have been at a low ebb indeed, and wickedness of every description must have been awfully prevalent. It is customary with many, to speak in a desponding tone of the present state of religion, as if it were greatly inferior to what it was in former times. According to the view which they take, every succeeding generation is growing worse and worse. This is a mistaken impression. A perusal of the *Solemn Warning*,

* Display vol. ii. p. 148.

published by the Associate Synod in 1758, will show that the Fathers of the Secession did not live in the golden age of christianity, any more than do their children, and that great though the amount of vice and infidelity be, that is spread throughout the community at the present day, there is, in many respects, a decided improvement in the religious state of our country. The following extracts, taken from the *Warning*, show that the days in which our lot is cast, are, at least, *not worse* than those in which our fathers lived, and that much of the wailing made about the awful degeneracy of the present times is misplaced.

“ The present generation,” say the writers of the *Solemn Warning*, “ abounds with infidels, who reject the Holy Scriptures, the doctrine of the adorable Trinity, and the whole christian religion. Most daring and ludicrous attacks are made, without control, upon the christian mysteries and institutions. Almost all the current writings of this age concerning religion, are on the side of infidelity and libertinism, or of opposition to the peculiar doctrines of christianity. The fashionable part of those who retain the christian profession, have gone into the scheme of subjecting God’s decrees about men to their own behaviour, maintaining a conditional universality of redemption, ascribing a freedom of will to fallen men for that which is spiritually good, suspending the whole efficacy of divine grace upon the pleasure of that free will, and denying the infallible perseverance of the saints. The truth of Christ’s mediatory righteousness and satisfaction, the imputation thereof to sinners for their justification, yea, the whole doctrines of the Lord’s word about free grace and saving faith are commonly denied or subverted, made the objects of sneer and raillery by such as pretend to a refined taste. The doctrinal articles and Confession of Faith, which are public authority in the established churches of Britain and Ireland, are no longer any evidence of what religious principles are actually held by the generality of ministers or people in these churches.

“ The preaching of Christ crucified, and of the several

mysteries which depend upon, or are inseparably connected with the doctrine of his cross, is gone out of fashion. These matters are no more to be heard of from the pulpits of the corrupt ministry which now much prevails, than in the schools of heathen philosophers, except that some christian terms may be used, without any inculcating of christian truths : and instead thereof, the poor people are entertained with harangues of paganish morality. A general contempt is thus poured upon the great doctrines of the gospel, which broke forth with eminent lustre at the reformation from popery, those blessed doctrines whereby the consciences of men were led to a sweet rest, which they had sought in vain from masses, indulgences, pilgrimages, penances, and purgatory. We retain the name of protestants, while the marrow and substance of the protestant religion is generally discarded. The christian salvation is gone out of sight, out of request, amongst the most part of this generation, with unspeakable loss and hazard to multitudes of immortal souls."

After describing the godless conduct of persons of elevated rank, the *Warning* proceeds:—"There is a general contempt of the gospel, and neglect of the great salvation. Practical atheism abounds, with profane mockings at the mysteries of religion. Brutish ignorance of the gospel overspreads, through the prevailing of ignorant and corrupt teachers; and the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, generally living without any concern about their souls or regard to a future state. Popish abominations are gaining ground. The anti-christian and idolatrous mass is frequented, in many places, through these lands. The Holy Scriptures are burlesqued, divine ordinances are contemned, and public worship is widely degenerated into a sort of theatrical entertainment. A heinous profanation of the Lord's name is carried on, by imposing a frequent and unnecessary repetition of oaths, sometimes on the same day; by false swearing, particularly in customhouse oaths; yea, by a general mixing of blasphemous oaths and curses with ordinary conversation, especially in our fleets and armies. The holy Sabbath is com-

monly profaned, by neglecting both the private and public duties of that day, by frequent and unnecessary journeying, and by attending to secular business, or carnal amusements.

“Many are without natural affection, unmindful of relative duties, unruly, disobedient, enemies to the authority, peace, and welfare of the civil government under which they live. The lands are defiled with murders, rioting, and drunkenness. There is an epidemical prodigality, vanity, and lasciviousness in apparel, with fornications, adulteries, and uncleanness of all sorts: And the profane diversions of the stage, masquerades, night assemblies, balls, and promiscuous dancings, are greatly run upon, as powerful incentives to all that wickedness. Fraud and injustice in dealings betwixt man and man doth much abound; and the wicked practice of smuggling, which is commonly attended with perjuries, and often with profanations of the Lord’s day. There is likewise a woeful course of oppression, lying, dissimulation, evil speaking, backbiting, malice, envy, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

“Such is the prevailing complexion of the present age, for which the Lord has a controversy with these lands. *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint; we are a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters*: The threatened issue whereof is, to have our country desolate, and our cities burnt with fire.”*

At next meeting of Synod (April 1759), Mr Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, proposed that the Synod should take into their serious consideration the following question, viz. “If it is called for duty, to lay before the king our grievances concerning the present state of religion in these lands, together with a dutiful and suitable petition for redress of the same?” He also presented a paper, containing reasons in support of the affirmative side of the question. But the Synod delayed the consideration of it till their meeting in October, when, after some discussion, they agreed, without a vote, to lay aside the farther consideration of this

* A Solemn Warning, &c.

motion in their present circumstances. Mr Gib took the lead in opposing this proposal, and read a paper containing answers to Mr Moncrieff's reasons, which he afterwards published.* He argued, that it was not competent for the Synod to petition the sovereign on such a subject. "We ought," said he, "to sigh and cry for public and prevailing abominations: But we may not arrogate, that what men *owe to God and their own consciences*, about the purging of these abominations, is a thing which they owe to us as a redress of our grievances. Whenever we should hear of any profane and illegal usages taking place in any cities of Britain and Ireland, or in any families that we have no inspection of, we might as well take upon us to call these things *our grievances*, and might go to claim a reformation of them from the magistrates of these cities, or the masters of these families, as a thing which is due to us, a redress of our grievances. Thus, the competency of petitioning the sovereign for a redress of our grievances, says nothing at all to the competency of such a step as is now proposed to be taken: It is a step which ought to be considered in a quite different light from that of petitioning for a redress of our grievances."

He further urged, that even though the motion were to be adopted by the Synod, it would be impracticable to carry it into effect. "We cannot formally present any address or petition to the king, without getting some great personage to introduce us. But though this were done, and a favourable audience got, yet the difficulty would not be over; for all that could be expected of the king, according to the nature of the business, is, to recommend us by a message to the houses of parliament, in our going to address them; and we could have no access to them, but by a method of address which is inconsistent with our principles, taking in the title of *Lords Spiritual*. But, though this could be dispensed with, yet there is no access to lay a petition before

* Display, vol. ii. p. 231.

either house of parliament, without getting a member of the house to introduce it.

“ When such is the case, it may be thought even ridiculous to suppose that these bars could be surmounted by us in the present state of matters. And how can we think that the Lord is calling us to any work that must depend on a ridiculous supposition as to the practicableness of it? What he calls to, he paves a way for : But he seems to have much yet to do as to the levelling of mountains in the way, before we can have such work to do as is presently under consideration.”

Mr Gib further maintained, in opposing the motion, that compliance with it would be unscriptural. “ The step now proposed,” said he, “ seems to have no precepts or examples of the Lord’s word. The Scripture enjoins us to obey the civil powers in all things lawful, to honour them, to pay them tribute, and to pray for them, that we lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. But no precept appears to be in the Scripture for any other or higher sphere of duty toward them, in the case of such as have providentially no immediate communication with them. Moreover, that nothing in the behaviour of the prophets under the Old Testament can bear out the present motion, has been already shown : And it appears to have no sort of countenance from the practice of our Lord’s apostles under the New Testament.

“ If there could be a time for any such application to civil powers as is now proposed, it would seem to have been in the first period of the gospel, when apostles were employed to fight against the fashionable corruptions of the world, in propagating the christian religion. Men who had an universal commission for that end, were privileged with supernatural assistance, and infallible conduct in the matter, and who were endued with a power of working miracles, by which their authority could easily be documented to earthly powers where ever needful. But, in all the course of their ministry, they made no such application to these powers. They never called on the assistance of the secular arm against

the prevailing abominations, whatever advantages they had for doing so from the universality of their commission, and the miraculous powers with which it was accompanied. Our Lord did not see meet to make choice of that *secular way* for promoting the interests of his kingdom.

“ It cannot be said that we have any more of a providential intercourse with civil powers than the apostles had, or even near so much as some of them. And christian magistrates can have no more need of being dealt with about the true religion, than heathen magistrates had. Nor can ordinary ministers have a farther warrant to deal with the one sort, than apostles had to deal with the other. At the same time, though our Solemn Covenants are a superadded obligation to the duties previously incumbent from the Lord’s word, yet they cannot be taken as a foundation of any new duties, or as conferring upon us any rights and privileges in religious matters, beyond what apostles could claim, or presumed to use.”*

These sentiments are much in unison with those that are held by the voluntary church writers in our own day ; and they show us, that even at that early period correct views of the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom, and of the mischievous effects of political interference with it, had found their way into the Secession Church. Mr Gib’s views were so much in accordance with those of the brethren assembled at that meeting of Synod, that the proposal brought forward by Mr Moncrieff could not find a supporter amongst them ; they were unanimous in declaring, that the adopting of it, in present circumstances, would be inexpedient.

Mr Moncrieff, not satisfied with the rejecting of his motion, again brought it forward at several subsequent meetings, viz. in April and August 1760, as also in April and August 1761. At these meetings, his views were seconded by Mr Andrew Thomson, minister at Mearns ; but the Synod adhered to their former resolution of laying aside the motion.

* Display, vol. ii. p 243.

When the Synod met in April 1761, an overture was transmitted from the presbytery of Glasgow, and another from the presbytery in Ireland, in which it was proposed, that the Synod should consider the propriety of presenting a dutiful and loyal address to his Majesty (George III.) who had lately ascended the British throne. Mr Moncrieff insisted that these overtures should be considered in connexion with the motion which he had formerly brought forward, to represent to the king the state of religion in these lands, and to petition for a redress of grievances. This the Synod refused to do. They were willing that Mr Moncrieff's proposal should be re-considered at a future meeting if he insisted on it, but they did not think proper to blend it with the present question.

The overtures gave rise to considerable discussion. There does not appear to have been any diversity of opinion amongst the members about the lawfulness or duty of presenting a congratulatory address to his majesty. But the prevailing sentiment amongst them was, that, as the law did not recognize them in their united capacity as an ecclesiastical court, an address presented by them in this character could not be constitutionally received; and that, even though they should agree to present one, they could have no opportunity afforded them of approaching the throne with it. On these grounds, the proposal for presenting an address was laid aside; while they agreed, at the same time, to put upon their record a strong expression of their attachment to the reigning family, and of their loyalty to the person and government of his majesty.

The following resolution, which they adopted on this subject, will show what was the spirit by which they were animated:—"The Associate Synod having an overture transmitted to them from the associate presbytery of Glasgow, as also from the associate presbytery in Ireland, for making a dutiful and loyal address to the king on his accession to the throne, they spent some time in conferring upon this subject. And though it is manifest, by many public

and unquestionable evidences, that the testimony in which they are engaged, and which they reckon themselves obliged to maintain against the corruptions and defections of this period, both in church and state, has been all along accompanied with a sincere and stedfast loyalty to the civil government, in a zealous opposition to jacobitish and all other principles of rebellion or disaffection ; yet they take the present opportunity to declare, as they do hereby heartily agree in declaring, that they can yield to none of their fellow-subjects in prizing the civil government under which they live, as the best modelled government throughout the known world ; in respect to the memory of our late sovereign, King George II., as one of the best of kings, of the mildest administration, who ruled over us as the common father of his people ; in thankfulness for the peaceable accession of our present sovereign King George III. to the throne of these kingdoms ; in rejoicing at the auspicious beginning of his reign ; in a firm resolution to support and live dutifully under his government, in our several stations and capacities, according to the word of God, and our received and known principles founded thereon, to which we are bound by solemn covenant ; in an inviolable attachment to the protestant succession, in the illustrious family of Hanover ; and in a full purpose still to maintain these principles among the people under our inspection. But the Synod find themselves obliged to drop the foresaid overture, because they have no view of obtaining a proper introduction to the king with such an address, and because the designation which they bear, in their united capacity, has not been taken knowledge of by their civil superiors, so as they might expect that it could be admitted in an address to the throne."

At the next meeting of Synod in August, Mr Moncrieff again brought forward his motion about petitioning the king concerning public defections and corruptions. But his motion met with no better success than formerly ; the Synod were almost unanimous in again rejecting it. Mr Moncrieff dissented from this decision, and craved, in his own name,

and in the name of all who might adhere to him, that *the door might be left open to him* till another meeting, to offer to the Synod what might be necessary for the exoneration of himself in this matter.

Before another meeting of Synod arrived, Mr Moncrieff was removed to another world. He died on the 7th October 1761. His character ranked high, both as a man and as a minister. He possessed great firmness, and dignity, and independence of mind. Descended from a highly respectable family, he had received in early life an excellent education; and at an early period, his mind was deeply imbued with a sense of religion. Though from the respectability of his connexions, the fairest worldly prospects opened upon his view, yet, renouncing every worldly pursuit, he made the christian ministry his deliberate and decided choice. For discharging the duties of this honourable office, he was no less qualified by his personal piety, than by his extensive theological attainments. Being appointed to the theological chair after the death of Mr Wilson, he continued to occupy it for a period of nearly twenty years, and was honoured to train up many for the ministry, who were eminently useful in the church. In all the proceedings connected with the rise and progress of the Secession, he had taken an active part; and it must have been gratifying to him to witness before his death, the high degree of prosperity which it had attained. At a *pro re nata* meeting of Synod, held in consequence of his death, his son, Mr William Moncrieff, minister at Alloa, was appointed, on the 10th of February 1762, to succeed him as Professor of Divinity.

It is pleasing to contemplate the zeal which the Synod displayed, at this early period of its history, in the cause of missions. So successful were its exertions in Ireland, that, at the period of Mr Moncrieff's death, the number of its congregations in that country amounted to eighteen, under the superintendence of two presbyteries.* Its preachers were

* These two presbyteries were the presbytery of Newtonlimavady, and the presbytery of Moyrah and Lisburn. The former of these consisted of

sent occasionally to labour on the south side of the Tweed. Whitehaven, Kendal, North Shields, and Mansfield in the county of Nottingham, enjoyed the benefit of their labours. On an application made from certain individuals in the Isle of Man, preachers were also sent to labour in that island. The Synod manifested a laudable anxiety to increase the number of its missionaries in America, and made considerable exertions for this purpose. In the summer of 1758, Mr Matthew Henderson received ordination from the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline, and was immediately sent across the Atlantic, to strengthen the hands of the brethren who were labouring in Pennsylvania; and, three years afterwards, other three missionaries were despatched to the same destination, viz. Mr John Mason, Mr Robert Annan, and Mr John Smart. To defray the expense of these missions, collections were made throughout the congregations under the inspection of the Synod; and the zeal displayed by the ministers was met by a corresponding liberality on the part of the people.

One of the chief difficulties which the Synod had to contend with, in their missionary operations, was to overcome the reluctance which many of the preachers had to go and labour amid the woods and swamps of America. The Synod, however, entertained high notions of their presbyterial authority; and, though they did not refuse to sustain reasonable excuses, yet they were in general peremptory in enforcing compliance with their missionary appointments. They made an enactment (August 1760), that any young men,

the following ministers, with their congregations:—Mr Alexander Stewart, at Newton; Mr John Tennant, at Roseyards and Ballyroshane; Mr Robert Reid, at Ray; Mr Robert Law, at Donachmere.

Under the superintendence of this presbytery, were the following vacant congregations, viz. Achadowie, Ramelton, Machrochil; Alachmore, and Garvah.

Connected with the latter presbytery, were the following ministers, with their congregations:—Mr Isaac Paton, at Temple-Patrick; Mr David Arrott, at Markethill; Mr James Hume, at Moyrah and Lisburn; Mr James Martin, at Bangor.

In connexion with this presbytery, were the following vacant congregations, viz. Ballyeaston, Larne, Belfast, Drumbanagher, and Sheepbridge.

whether preachers or students, who shall refuse to comply with the appointments of Synod, to go and preach the gospel in North America, without having any peculiar difficulties in their case, were not to expect any farther employment or encouragement from the Synod, either as probationers or students: and, as the hope of obtaining a settlement in this country operated as a temptation to induce preachers to refuse undertaking a transatlantic mission, it was further enacted, at a subsequent meeting (April 1763), that no probationer who is under an appointment to go to America, shall be allowed to be proposed as a candidate, in any moderation of a call that may take place in this country. Such enactments as these, though they may be considered by some as carrying the exercise of ecclesiastical authority to an undue pitch, yet show the zeal by which the members of the Synod were animated, in sending the gospel to foreign lands.

The favourable reception which the Synod gave to a memorial that was laid before them, at this period, by a committee of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, shows the deep interest which they felt in the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and affords a pleasing proof of the truly catholic spirit by which they were influenced, in diffusing the knowledge of the gospel both at home and abroad.

The society now mentioned, had appointed a number of gentlemen in New England, as a board of correspondence, that they might prepare and execute a proper scheme for spreading the knowledge of the gospel among the North American Indians. As ignorance of the language of these untutored tribes, constituted one of the chief obstacles to the accomplishment of this benevolent work, so the plan which the New England board proposed, with a view to the surmounting of this difficulty, was the following:—That a certain number of the Indian youths, of the most promising talents and dispositions, be taken and educated under the superintendence of the board, and that they be instructed

in the knowledge of the English language, and in all needful literature; and that the same number of New England youths be sent to reside, for a certain period, among the Indians, that they may learn their language, and become accustomed to their mode of living; after which they were to be recalled, and to be instructed along with the young Indians, under the same roof, and by the same masters. Their course of education being completed, they were to be sent forth two and two, a New-Englander and an Indian together, that they might labour among the Indian tribes. But, as the advantages resulting from such a plan could not be realized without considerable time spent in preparation, it was further proposed by the board that a few well qualified missionaries be immediately sent forth, accompanied by interpreters, to communicate religious instruction to those tribes on the western border, that might seem best disposed to receive it.

Such was the scheme proposed by the New England board for the evangelizing of the American Indians; and for the execution of which, a considerable sum of money was raised by the inhabitants of the town of Boston. The Society at home cordially acquiesced in the proposal, and they solicited the aid of the Associate Synod, in their benevolent undertaking. In a memorial presented to the Synod, in April, 1763, the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge expressed their hope that the Synod will give all encouragement to a design of such importance to the interests of religion and of mankind, and to the peace and prosperity of Britain and her colonies, and that they will be pleased to assist them, by appointing a collection to be made in all their congregations. The Synod, having considered the memorial, expressed their approbation of it; and, though they had at their present meeting agreed to send out another mission of their own to America, and ordered three students to hold themselves in readiness for this destination, and had, moreover, appointed a collection to be made, to defray the expenses of this new mission; yet, to encourage the scheme of

evangelizing the American Indians, they authorised their treasurer to pay into the funds of the Society the sum of £50, to be applied to the sole purpose of propagating the knowledge of christianity among the Indian tribes of North America.

Another benevolent object which occupied the attention of the Synod, was the formation of a fund, out of which supplies might be occasionally given to ministers' widows (in connexion with their own religious society), when left in indigent circumstances. The ministers had been accustomed to give a certain sum, out of their own incomes, for this purpose, according to the option of each individual; but this had been found inadequate to meet the necessities of widows and their families, left without any adequate provision being made for them; and it was resolved that, in addition to these voluntary contributions by the ministers, each session should pay out of their funds an annual sum, the amount of which was to be proportioned (agreeably to a fixed scale) to the number of examinable persons in each congregation. The liberality displayed, by both ministers and people, in contributing to the support of so many laudable objects, deserves to be recorded in terms of the highest commendation.* There are few better proofs of the predominance of christian principle in a church, than when those who enjoy the privileges of her communion, contribute liberally of their substance for pious and charitable purposes.

* The congregations belonging to the Synod contributed to the support of the following objects:—Missions to America; giving assistance to students of divinity; affording relief to minister's widows; a fund for the general purposes of the association. At this period they also gave a salary of £30 annually to the person who taught the Philosophical Class, in connexion with the Theological Seminary. The teaching of this class was usually entrusted to one of the more advanced students, who was appointed by the Synod, and who delivered prelections according to a particular text-book, prescribed to him for this purpose.

CHAPTER VII.

State of matters in the national church. Formation of the Relief Presbytery. Continued prosperity of the Secession. Mr Robert Carmichael accused of heresy. Statement of his opinions. Appears before the Synod. Is deposed and excommunicated. Mr Laurence Wotherspoon's essay. Declared heretical. Mr Wotherspoon is rebuked and suspended. Expresses his penitence. Sentence of suspension removed. Case of Mr Andrew Marshall student. Mr Alexander Pirie, teacher of the Philosophical Class. Accused of recommending heterodox books to the students. Subjected to discipline. Deprived of his licence and excommunicated. Bids defiance to the Synod. Leaves the Secession. Overture about preaching. Remarks on the overture. Watchfulness of the Synod over the students. Philosophical Class. Curriculum prescribed in it. Examinations. Report of an examining committee. Mr Thomas Mair makes application to be restored. Application unsuccessful. Overture about probationers and ministers preaching in vacant congregations. American missions. Zeal of the Synod. Preachers averse to go. Mr Mason settled in New York. Death of Mr Gellatly. Pennsylvanian presbytery. Missionary appointments. Coalition of the Burgher and Antiburgher missionaries in America. Disapproved of by the Synod. Mr David Telfar's letter to the Synod. Unfavourably received. Mr Gib's overture about the Secession Testimony. Reasons for adopting it. Consideration of it delayed. Mr Gib protests. Absents himself from the meetings of Synod. Is called to account. Reads a paper in explanation of his conduct. Paper inserted in the minutes. Mr Gib's overture rejected. Mr Gib dissents. Overture about the support of widows and children of deceased ministers. Regulations of the public fund. Secession preachers sent to Caithness. Preach to the Highlanders. Encouragement given to Gaelic students. Recommendation given to congregations concerning ministers' stipends. Penal statutes against Roman Catholics repealed. Alarm excited by this measure. Synod testifies against the repeal.

Remarks upon it. New York presbytery formed. Synod refuse to acknowledge it. Dealings with Mr Gib. His overture adopted. Regulations about students of divinity.

It is fitted to excite surprise that the rapid increase of separatists from the national church did not induce those, who presided over her councils, to adopt a more conciliatory, as well as more christian, line of policy toward the people. If they had been capable of being taught by experience, they ought certainly to have learned lessons of caution and wisdom from the events which had taken place. They had expelled, in an arbitrary manner, from the communion of the church, some of the best of her ministers. They had alienated, by their unscriptural and oppressive proceedings, the affections of a large part of the population. The consequence of this course of procedure, which they had for a series of years pursued, was, that they now beheld two Secession Synods actively engaged in extending their influence over the country, and every day increasing their strength, by the accessions which they were constantly making to the number of their adherents. Common prudence would have dictated to the leaders of the General Assembly, in these circumstances, to have paused in their headlong career, and calmly to have considered, what was the best method to be adopted, with a view to bring back those who had deserted their communion ; or, at least, to retain possession of those, who had not yet gone out from them. Instead of doing this, they treated the complaints of the people with contempt. The galling yoke of patronage they rivetted more firmly than ever. They avowed it to be their determination to carry into effect all presentations, however unpopular ; and the wishes of the people, however reasonable in themselves, and however loudly expressed, had, every year, less and less attention paid to them, until at last they were totally disregarded. Instances might occasionally occur of a successful opposition being made to the settlement of an unpopular candidate, but these were few in number.

By pursuing this lordly system of government, in opposition to the dictates of Scripture and of common prudence, the ecclesiastical rulers not only swelled the ranks of the Secession, but they gave rise to a new class of separatists from the church, who assumed to themselves the designation of *The Presbytery of Relief*. I shall here briefly advert to the circumstances, in which this presbytery originated. A detail of these circumstances, though not immediately connected with the object of this narrative, yet may with propriety be introduced, not only on account of the affinity which the Relief bears to the Secession, in its origin and progress, but also as tending to show the melancholy condition, to which the people, and in some instances the ministers, were reduced by the tyrannical conduct of the General Assemblies of that period.

The deposition of Mr Gillespie, minister at Carnock, by a sentence of the supreme court, for refusing to take any part in a violent settlement, has already been noticed. Notwithstanding the sentence which had been pronounced, he continued to exercise the duties of the ministerial office. A place of worship having been erected for him, in the town of Dunfermline, he there dispensed to a numerous and respectable congregation the ordinances of the gospel. For some years he laboured without having any co-adjutors in the ministry; as his former associates, however willing they might have been to render him assistance, and however gladly he might have received it, dared not show him any countenance. But after some time, he and other two ministers constituted themselves into a presbytery in the following circumstances.

A vacancy having occurred in the town and parish of Jedburgh, by the death of their minister, Mr James Winchester, which took place in September 1755, the elders resolved that they would oppose the settlement of any minister who should be intruded into the parish, contrary to the wishes of the people; and a written agreement was subscribed by them to the following effect;—"Be it known to all those to whom

these presents may come, that we, the elders in the town and country parish of Jedburgh, do unanimously agree and resolve, through the strength of divine grace, to stand and fall together in the election or voice of a minister, for this parish, against all solicitations, threats, or bribes whatsoever, or from whomsoever, and against all intrusion that may be attempted on said parish by any minister whatsoever, and that we shall cleave and adhere firmly to the majority of this parish in the choice, as aforesaid, and this we do certify," &c. A paper was at the same time circulated among the parishioners, to obtain signatures in favour of Mr Thomas Boston,* minister at Oxnam, to be minister of Jedburgh. But the crown, to whom the patronage belonged, without taking any notice of these proceedings, gave the presentation to Mr John Bonar, minister at Cockpen. As Mr Bonar had always been opposed to violent settlements, and as he had in the meantime received a call to Perth, an arrangement was made, with his consent, betwixt the General Assembly and the crown agent, whereby the presentation, which he had received to Jedburgh, was laid aside. And though the wishes of the parish had been loudly expressed in favour of Mr Boston, yet the object of their choice was passed over; and another minister, Mr John Douglas, minister of Kenmure, was presented to the vacant charge. This appointment was still more unpopular than the preceding one, and the opposition to it still more keen. When the call was moderated for Mr Douglas, no more than five signatures could be obtained to it out of a considerable population. The presbytery refused to proceed with it, and the matter came before the Assembly. The supreme court referred the cause back to the presbytery; and the presbytery continuing obstinate, the business was brought before the Assembly a second time, who asserted their authority, and enjoined the presbytery to proceed with Mr Douglas's admission without delay.

* This person was son of Mr Boston of Ettrick, whose writings have been held in such high estimation by the pious in this country.

In the meantime, the people of Jedburgh having renounced all hope of obtaining the object of their choice, through the ordinary channels, proceeded to build a place of worship for Mr Boston, that they might obtain his ministrations independent of the Assembly. When the building was finished, and all things were ready for his being inducted into his new charge, Mr Boston appeared before the presbytery of Jedburgh, in the month of December, 1759, and laid upon their table his demission, the tenor whereof follows : *—"The demission of me, Mr Thomas Boston, minister of Oxnam, humbly sheweth, albeit there are several things in the national church which have been all along disagreeable to me, yet the present mode of settling vacant churches, by the mere force of presentations, which has been so long persisted in, and is almost every year prosecute more vigorously, is so diametrically opposite to all the laws of Jesus Christ about that matter, has such a manifest tendency to fill the church with naughty members, to mar the edification of the body of Christ, and, in fine, utterly to destroy the dying remains of religion in the nation, that I can no longer sit a member of the present judicatories of this church, but must leave my place there, that I may take my part with the oppressed heritage of God. When I entered on my ministry in the national church, more than twenty years ago, even then I beheld with concern violent settlements authorised by the General Assemblies thereof. But in these days there was a very considerable number of members who opposed such violence, and they were, by their nature and influence, a pretty good balance against those who favoured them. Hence, when the General Assembly, or their Commission, had authorised a violent settlement, the next Assembly was readily composed of such members as were disposed to check and control these tyrannical measures. But, alas ! the times

* I have introduced this document at full length into the narrative, because it furnishes unexceptionable evidence, that the state of matters, instead of improving, was growing worse and worse in the Scottish Church ; and shows us what urgent necessity there was for the existence of the Secession.

are visibly altered to the worse. The bulk of these worthy men who opposed the encroachments complained of, are, it is likely, retired to their rest and reward. The evidence hereof is, that, for a course of years past, we find one Assembly after another changing their members, but never changing their tyrannical measures in settling vacant churches. Those who adhere to the ancient principles and practice of the Church of Scotland in this matter, are now reduced to such a small and inconsiderable handful, that they are quite run down by their numerous opponents, and have it not in their power to reform these crying abuses, nor to do justice to the oppressed, while they continue in the communion of the church. Upon these and other considerations, which afterwards may be made manifest, I judge it my duty to give up the place which I hold as a minister of the national church, and at the same time to continue in the full exercise of that ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, as God in his providence shall give me opportunity. Therefore wit ye me, the said Mr Thomas Boston, to have demitted and laid down, like as I hereby *simpliciter* demit and lay down, my pastoral charge of the parish of Oxnam, and deliver over the said parish into the hands of the reverend presbytery of Jedburgh, within whose bounds it lies; craving that the said reverend presbytery may, upon this my demission being lodged in their clerk's hands, and read in their presence, find the said parish vacant, and cause the same be declared in due form, and proceed to the settlement of a gospel minister therein, with all convenient speed; upon all which I take instruments, and crave extracts.

“ T. BOSTON.”

Mr Boston having thus renounced, by his own voluntary demission, the communion of the national church, took possession on the following Sabbath of the new place of worship which had been prepared for him in the town of Jedburgh, and immediately formed a connexion with Mr

Gillespie. It was some time, however, before they proceeded to acts of government. They did not meet together, in a presbyterial capacity, till the month of October, 1761. A violent settlement having taken place in the parish of Kilconquhar, in Fife, the people, following the example which was now so generally set, immediately built a place of worship for themselves, in the village of Colinsburgh, and gave a call to a Mr Collier, who had laboured for some time among the English Dissenters in Northumberland. Messrs Gillespie and Boston, with an elder from each of their congregations, met at Colinsburgh on the 22d of the above month, to admit this person to his charge. The services of the day commenced by Mr Boston preaching the admission sermon ; after which, as a presbytery, they “ required of Mr Collier a solemn declaration of his faith in God ; in the Scriptures as the word of God ; his adherence to the constitution of the presbyterian Church of Scotland ; his acquiescence with the principles of the said constitution, as exhibited in the creeds of the Church of Scotland, her Confession of Faith, form of worship, and her manner of church government, according to reformation principles ; all which Mr Collier declared he believed to be sound and orthodox, and promised to abide by the same, in all dutiful subjection to his brethren.”

On the same day, these three ministers met again in the afternoon ; and, after prayer by Mr Gillespie, they “ unanimously agreed to call themselves the Presbytery of Relief, for the following reasons :—Whereas Mr Thomas Gillespie, minister of the gospel at Carnock, was deposed by the General Assembly, 1752, merely on account that he would not settle Mr Andrew Richardson, then minister of the gospel at Broughton, as minister of the gospel at Inverkeithing, contrary to the will of the congregation ; and thus, in contradiction to Scripture, in opposition to the constitution and standing laws of the Church of Scotland, which had Mr Gillespie done, would have been a manifest violation of the solemn oaths and engagements he came under, when admitted minister of Carnock, and therefore a presumptuous sin,

and highly aggravated transgression of the law of the great God and our Saviour.

“ Likewise Mr Thomas Boston, then minister of the gospel at Oxnam, received a scriptural call from the parish and congregation at Jedburgh, to minister among them in holy things, which call he regularly accepted, according to Christ’s appointment ; and as the presbytery refused to loose the relation betwixt him and the parish of Oxnam, though required to establish a relation betwixt him and the congregation and parish of Jedburgh, he thought, though they refused to do their duty, he was bound to do his by the divine authority ; therefore, peaceably and orderly, gave into the presbytery a demission of his charge at Oxnam, and took charge of the congregation at Jedburgh.

“ Also Mr Thomas Collier, late minister of the gospel at Ravenstonedale, being admitted minister this day to the congregation of Colinsburgh, to fulfil among them that ministry he hath received of the Lord.

“ These three ministers think themselves indispensably bound, by the authority of the Lord Redeemer, King and Head of the church, to fulfil every part of the ministry they have received from him ; and for that end, in concurrence with ruling elders, to constitute a presbytery, as Scripture directs, for committing that ministry Christ has entrusted them with to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others, and to act for the relief of the oppressed christian congregations, when called in providence. And herein they act the same part precisely they did when ministers, members of the Established Church of Scotland. Therefore the presbytery did, and hereby do, form themselves into a *Presbytery of Relief*, for the relief of christians oppressed in their christian privileges.

“ The presbytery, thus constituted, chose the Rev. Mr Boston for their moderator ; and the presbytery appointed Thursday, the 7th of December next, to be observed in the congregations under their inspection as a day of solemn thanksgiving unto God for his goodness in the late harvest.

The presbytery also agreed that their next meeting should be when Providence calls."*

Such were the circumstances in which the Relief Church originated. It owed its origin to causes similar to those which gave rise to the Secession, viz. the oppressive measures that were pursued by the ecclesiastical rulers in the national church. As the founders of it were men of acknowledged piety and worth, and as it was founded on the broad principle of giving relief to all who were "oppressed in their christian privileges," it speedily increased. Soon after its formation, the presbytery received an accession of strength, by the Rev. Mr Bain of the High Church of Paisley seceding from the national church, and joining their communion; and only a few years elapsed, when the number of its congregations was so greatly increased, that instead of one presbytery, they were subdivided into two, and thereafter constituted themselves into a Synod. For a considerable period, the Relief Church had no theological seminary of their own. Their young men were trained up for the sacred office of the ministry in the theological halls of the Established Church. They were also considered by many as being too indiscriminate in their admission to communion. Both of these causes operated to their prejudice. The first, however, no longer exists, as they have now a respectable Theological Professor appointed by their own Synod; and their candidates for the holy ministry are thus trained up under their own immediate superintendence. The second, also, is to a considerable extent corrected, as it is generally admitted, that they are not now so free in their admissions to communion as they were in the earlier periods of their history. They are a numerous and respectable society, widely extended over the country; and they cheerfully co-operate with other religious communities in doing good.

It does not appear that the formation of the Relief Presbytery had any influence in impeding the progress of the Secession in either of its branches. By opening a wider

* Struther's History of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 593, &c.

door of separation than that which the Secession had previously opened, many were thereby induced to leave the mother church, who might otherwise have remained in her communion; and by thus increasing the number of separatists, it tended to weaken the power of the Establishment. But, at this early period, the Secession and the Relief seldom, if ever, crossed one another's paths, as betwixt the ground which each occupied, there was a strong line of demarcation drawn.

As the toleration of error in the national church was one of the chief reasons of the Secession, so it was peculiarly incumbent on the Seceders to guard against the introduction of this pestilence into their own church. Having borne testimony against the defections of others in this respect, they were under more than ordinary obligations to maintain purity of doctrine among themselves. This is a point with regard to which the ecclesiastical judicatories of the Secession have ever shown themselves exceedingly watchful; and it is satisfactory to know, that whatever evils have afflicted her during the course of her history, she has ever been enabled to hold fast the form of sound words, and has contended successfully, as well as earnestly, for the faith once delivered to the saints. The proceedings of the General Associate Synod, in reference to Mr Thomas Mair, recorded in the preceding chapter, show the fixed determination of this portion of the Secession Church not to tolerate any views which they considered inconsistent with sound doctrine. Other cases soon occurred, in which the Synod showed, by their prompt and vigorous interference, that they would not sanction, in either ministers, or preachers, or students, any deviation from that system of doctrine and government, which, as a church, they professed to hold, and which was distinctly laid down in their acknowledged standards.

At the meeting of Synod in April 1762, a representation from the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline brought before them the case of Mr Robert Carmichael, minister at Cupar of Angus. In the month of November of the pre-

ceding year, the presbytery had suspended this individual from the exercise of his ministry, on account of his having “relinquished the Secession testimony,” and adopted “the wildest sectarian and independent principles.”* Mr Carmichael, after sentence of suspension had been pronounced upon him, left Cupar, and went to reside in Dundee; and the presbytery referred the case to the supreme court, that they might determine what farther censure ought to be inflicted on him. The Synod ordered Mr Carmichael to be summoned to attend their next meeting, which he accordingly did. He appeared at their bar in the month of September; and being interrogated, he admitted that the representation given of his sentiments by the presbytery was correct, being defective only in the article about faith. When asked, if he was willing to renounce his opposition to the doctrines received by the Secession Church, he read a paper, entitled, *The declaration and confession of Robert Carmichael, containing an adherence unto, and explication of his new principles.*

In this paper, Mr Carmichael maintained, among other particulars, the following propositions:—“That faith is not the instrument, but a fruit and evidence of justification; that faith is nothing else but a belief of the truth, and not of a thing that has no existence until it be believed; that there is no foundation in Scripture for the universal call and offer of the gospel so much contended for; that God makes no offer of Christ, his righteousness and salvation, to any sinner, upon condition of his receiving and accepting thereof; that he (Mr Carmichael) was not satisfied with the common descriptions of faith, and the ‘mighty things’ ascribed to it, making it the means of instating sinners in the covenant of grace, the bond of union with Christ, the instrument of justification, &c.; that he saw the vanity and absurdity of all those directions and exhortations given to unbelievers in sermons and practical writings what they are to do to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, as not belong-

* This is the phraseology employed in the presbytery’s representation.

ing to the gospel, but tending to lead men off from Christ and his righteousness, to work some kind of righteousness of their own to recommend them to the favour of God, or at least some sort of righteousness to give them an interest in Christ's righteousness," &c. He further maintained the following articles :—" 1. That Christ's kingdom is altogether spiritual, and quite distinct from all earthly kingdoms, which cannot be maintained nor promoted by the authority of earthly kings, civil laws, and acts of parliament, giving sanction to the decrees of synods and councils. 2. That there can be no such thing as a national church under the New Testament, and yet be a church of Christ. 3. That confessions of faith and catechisms are not the standards of doctrine, nor a test of orthodoxy, but the word of God alone. 4. That there is no warrant for national covenanting under the New Testament. 5. That the government of the church by classical presbyteries, in the subordination of judicatories, however fit for a kingdom of this world, is not instituted by Christ, and never had a being until Calvin. 6. That there is no visible church of Christ, but a society of Christ's disciples, called together by the gospel, to observe all the ordinances he hath commanded, ruled by its own overseers, and depending upon Christ alone."*

The Synod declared, that this paper contained in it gross and dangerous errors ; and they characterized it as " amounting to a very deep and general attack upon the whole system of our received principles, yea, the received principles of all the protestant churches respecting the constitution of the christian church, and the whole doctrine of salvation, through the Lord Jesus Christ. After some discussion, the following motion was adopted :—" That though the said attack on our received principles, with the very gross and dangerous errors which Mr Carmichael has vented in opposition thereto, be evidently a most relevant ground for proceeding to high censure against him, yet, considering that the Synod can have no time at present for entering into a particular

* Scot's Magazine, vol. xxv. p. 523.

discussion of this matter, and that Mr Carmichael's behaviour at their bar has been with all appearance of ingenuity and sobriety as to the manner of it, the Synod, therefore, appoint a committee to take this paper under consideration, and to draw up remarks upon it, containing a detection of the gross errors which it contains ; with an overture concerning the whole, to be laid before next meeting of Synod ; and that Mr Carmichael shall have access, in the meantime, for conversing with the said committee, upon his intimating a desire to the members of it, that they may hold a meeting with him for that purpose."

Mr Carmichael did not attend next meeting of Synod (April 1763), and was declared to be contumacious. The committee appointed to converse with him, and to prepare remarks upon his paper, reported, that no meeting with him had taken place, and that no formal remarks had been prepared by them ; but they were of opinion, that what the Synod had formerly found, with regard to the erroneous sentiments contained in Mr Carmichael's paper, furnished a sufficient ground for proceeding against him ; and they further recommended, that the committee be authorised to prepare and publish, without delay, a statement of the gross errors contained in said paper. This recommendation was adopted, and the Synod entered upon the consideration of the whole question. The paper, containing Mr Carmichael's sentiments, was read ; and members having delivered their opinions concerning it, Mr Carmichael was found guilty of entertaining gross and dangerous errors : And the Synod solemnly deposed him from the office of the holy ministry ; and pronounced upon him the sentence of the lesser excommunication, debarring him from all communion with the church of Christ in her sealing ordinances, with certification, that if he did not appear before the Synod at their next meeting, and give satisfaction with regard to the gross and dangerous errors contained in his paper, they would proceed against him by the highest censure of the church. It does not appear, however, that any thing farther was done in the matter.

After pronouncing sentence of deposition upon Mr Carmichael, the Synod proceeded to consider the case of Mr Laurence Wotherspoon, one of their students, who was charged with having published an essay containing grossly heretical sentiments. This essay made its appearance in the Royal Magazine, and was entitled, "Reflections on the advantages of a liberal and polite education." Amongst other things, the writer affirmed, that the man of a liberal and polite education "stands the fairest way for gaining the applause of his indulgent Author, who formed him in the womb, and infused into his tender frame the principles of wisdom and humanity, of justice and benevolence:" that thence a man "will reckon it his highest honour to divest himself of all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice; and to dress himself in the lovely garments of charity and universal benevolence:" and that by this kind of education, "our happiness will be proportional to our acquisitions."*

When Mr Wotherspoon was dealt with, by the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline, to acknowledge the sinfulness of his conduct, in having published such a paper, he refused to give them any satisfaction; and they deemed the matter of such importance, as to bring it before the Synod. The paper, after being read and considered by the Synod, was declared to contain in it "a dangerous and detestable scheme of doctrine;" and Mr Wotherspoon, having acknowledged himself to be the writer of it, was called upon to state his views in reference to the sentiments which it contained. He declared his acquiescence in the judgment which the Synod had pronounced concerning his paper, and that he detested and abhorred the doctrines which were therein advanced. His confession was considered by some of the members not to be altogether free; and it was moved, that he should be rebuked and suspended from the enjoyment of the

* This specimen of philosophical jargon, which the objectionable essay contained, is extracted from a pamphlet written by Mr Adam Gib, entitled, "An Exposure of the false and abusive libel, entitled, The procedure of the Associate Synod in Mr Pirie's case represented," &c. P. 106.

privileges of the church, until he should give satisfactory evidence of his being truly sorry for the offence which he had committed. This motion was adopted. Mr Wotherspoon was rebuked at the bar of the Synod, and laid under the sentence of the lesser excommunication. In the mean time, he was remitted to the care of the presbytery, that they might deal with him, and endeavour to bring him to a proper sense of the sinfulness of his conduct. At the next meeting, the presbytery gave a favourable report of the spirit which Mr Wotherspoon had displayed in their conversations with him ; and Mr Wotherspoon himself having appeared before the Synod, and having expressed the deep sorrow which he had felt, on account of his conduct, also his entire acquiescence in the course which had been pursued, in order to reclaim him, the sentence of suspension formerly pronounced was removed ; and he was again restored to the communion of the church.

Mr Andrew Marshall, another student in divinity, was also subjected to discipline by the Synod for an offence similar to that which Mr Wotherspoon had committed. Inspired by the love of authorship, he too had sent a paper to the Royal Magazine, in which he had broached opinions, that were opposed to sound doctrine. Having selected as the theme of his essay the hackneyed topic of *Ambition*, he had, under this specious name, lauded in an offensive manner the reigning corruption of human nature ; and refusing to acknowledge that he had been guilty of any offence, or to express any sorrow, he was ordered to be rebuked by the moderator at the bar of the Synod, and to be debarred from the privileges of the church.

From these instances it would appear, that the philosophical mania, which at this period raged extensively within the pale of the Establishment, and rendered vapid and tasteless the discourses of her ministers, had begun to infect the minds of the Secession students ; and the Synod acted a wise and faithful part in checking at the very commencement that affectation of philosophical refinement, which,

wherever it prevails to any extent, exercises a withering influence upon the ministrations of the pulpit.

Upon inquiry, the Synod found, that the person whom they had employed to teach the Philosophical Class, in connexion with their Theological Seminary, had been recommending to the students books of a pernicious tendency, and had thereby endeavoured to infuse into their minds objectionable notions. To this individual they also applied the rod of discipline ; but they did not find him to be a tractable subject. Instead of meekly submitting to their rebukes, and acknowledging his fault, he threw down the gauntlet to them, and bade them open defiance. The person, whom the Synod took to task for his misconduct in this matter, was Mr Alexander Pirie. He had been appointed to succeed Mr John Mason, in teaching philosophy to the students ; and, after having taught the class, for about two years, he was ordered to be taken on trials for licence, with a view to his being sent on a mission to America. Mr Pirie does not appear to have been much inclined to this work ; for at the first meeting of Synod, after his appointment, he sent a letter requesting to be excused from going to America, on the ground of indisposition. The Synod sustained his excuse, in the mean time, but continued his missionary appointment upon him, and enjoined him to fulfil it, so soon as he should recover from the indisposition under which he was labouring.

But after this appointment was given, the Synod received such information as induced them to institute an inquiry into the truth of certain reports which were circulated, unfavourable to Mr Pirie's orthodoxy. In obedience to an intimation given to that effect, Mr Pirie appeared before the Synod at their meeting in August 1763, and being interrogated, whether he had recommended to the students of philosophy, lately under his charge, a book entitled, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, as a proper model upon which they should form their sentiments about these matters, he acknowledged that he had done so ; but denied that there was any thing objectionable in the book

which he had recommended. An essay on liberty and necessity, contained in this book, had been specially recommended by Mr Pirie to the students; and in his prelections on moral philosophy, he had adopted and inculcated the principles of the essay as his own. The Synod were of opinion, that the doctrine taught in this essay was opposed to scripture, and their authorised standards. In the deliverance, which they gave on the subject, they found, that the essay "evidently contains a doctrine of such necessity as necessarily excludes the consideration of man's fall and of original sin, with all blameableness and punishableness of any human actions, and contradicts the sovereignty of God's will, in his eternal decrees and universal providence." Mr Pirie maintained, in opposition to the Synod, that the doctrine taught in the essay, on the subject of liberty and necessity, was the same as that which is contained in the Secession standards. He declared that he had not discovered any errors in the essay, that he was willing to renounce whatever errors might be contained in it, so soon as the Synod should point them out; and that if he had thought the recommending of the treatise would have given offence, he would have refrained from doing it.

The opinion of Mr Pirie, on the point at issue, being opposed to that of the Synod, and his conduct being further aggravated by his having spoken in a contemptuous manner of the Synod's procedure, in reference to Mr Wotherspoon, he was subjected to the censure of the church. The Synod, by a vote, deprived him of his licence, as a probationer, excommunicated him from the privileges of the church, and appointed him to be solemnly rebuked at their bar. After the rebuke was administered, he appealed from the procedure of the Synod to the court of heaven, where, he said, he and they must soon appear, and then left the house, in a passionate manner, uttering offensive expressions against those who had sat in judgment upon him.

Having soon after received a call from a portion of the Abernethy congregation, with whom he had ingratiated him-

self, and having got connected with the other branch of the Secession, he was not long in their communion, when he was libelled before the presbytery of which he was a member, on the charge of heresy, and suspended from the exercise of his ministry. These proceedings gave him a distaste at the Secession. He considered himself a much injured individual, because he was not permitted to teach those sentiments that were most agreeable to himself. *After* his suspension, he found that the distinguishing principles of the Secession Church were not “the principles of the oracles of God;” and he gave in his declinature, renouncing all subjection to her authority. His final departure from her communion he signalled by the publication of an abusive pamphlet, in which he accused the Seceding ministers of uncharitable conduct, shuffling duplicity, perjury, and almost every thing that is bad.*

That affectation of philosophical refinement, in which had originated the cases of ecclesiastical discipline now recorded, had attracted the notice of the Synod before this; and, with the view of checking it, the following overture had been introduced so far back as the month of August 1761; and, after having been duly considered, was unanimously adopted, and ordered to be engrossed in the books of all the presbyteries, that they might conform to it, in licensing young men:—“That the Synod caution those under their inspection, who may be pointing towards public work

* The fame which this person afterward acquired, as a polemical writer, has induced me to notice more minutely, than I might otherwise have done, the particulars of his early connexion with the Secession Church, and the circumstances connected with his leaving it. Should the vituperative vocabulary of any of the controversialists of the present day, who are now writing against the Secession with such keenness, be exhausted, and should they be at a loss for a few angry and abusive expressions to give zest to their productions, I can recommend to them a pamphlet, entitled, *A Review of the principles and conduct of the Seceders*, &c. published by Mr Pirie, in 1769. They will here find a fresh supply. But, perhaps, this storehouse has already been ransacked by the most of them, as there is a wonderful similarity betwixt the beauties of speech employed by the present antagonists of the Secession, and those which Mr Pirie penned, upward of sixty years ago.

in the church, against an affected pedantry of style and pronunciation, and politeness of expression, in delivering the truths of the gospel, as being an using the enticing words of man's wisdom, and inconsistent with that gravity that the weight of the matter of the gospel requires, and as proceeding from an affectation to accommodate the gospel in point of style, which, if not prevented, may at length issue in attempts to accommodate it also, in point of matter, to the corrupted taste of a carnal generation; and that they recommend to all the ministers of this Synod to show a suitable pattern in this matter, in endeavouring in their public ministrations, by the manifestation of the truth, in plainness and gravity, to recommend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; and, at the same time, that the Synod give caution against all such meanness and impropriety of language, as hath a tendency to bring discredit upon the gospel; as also against using technical, philosophical, and learned terms, that are not commonly understood."

After the cases above mentioned had occurred, the Synod recommended it to all the ministers to take special notice of the students of divinity under their charge; "particularly with regard to any thing of modish affectation into which any of them may fall; and, upon observing "any appearances of this sort," they were immediately to deal with the guilty individuals; and, should faithful admonition prove unavailing, they were to bring the matter before the presbytery or Synod, as they might see proper. The Synod further declared, "that they would no longer countenance those students of divinity who should be found giving themselves up to such affectations."

Some may probably be inclined to smile at the idea of an assembly of grave and learned men sitting in judgment upon such minute particulars as these, and making them the subject of synodical regulation. Those who profess to be elevated above the ordinary class of mankind, by being possessed of a more polished taste, and a more highly cultivated

intellect than the rest of their species, may regard these things as indications that the first generation of Seceders were removed not many degrees, in point of refinement, above the Goths and Vandals of former times; and they may not be able to refrain from expressing their contempt at such regulations, on account of their supposed tendency to dim the light of philosophy, and repress the aspirations of youthful genius. Let not such persons be too hasty in pronouncing a sentence of condemnation. Let them remember what the professed object of the Synod was, in training up young men to the office of the holy ministry. Their object was not to train up a set of dry, showy, insipid preachers, whom the people could not understand, and from whom they could derive no benefit. There was an abundant supply of this class already to be found within the pale of the national church, to whom all the lovers of metaphysics, and of belles lettres might, if they pleased, resort; and, for the Synod to have increased the number, would have been frustrating one of the main designs of the Secession. What they aimed at accomplishing, was to train up for the ministry, men who should be distinguished for their sound scriptural views of theology, for their general acquaintance with literature, and for their personal piety; and who, by their plain, faithful, and affectionate mode of expounding the sacred volume, as well as by their pointed and solemn appeals to the conscience, might be instrumental in instructing the ignorant, arousing the careless, and in saving the souls of their fellow men. That these important ends of the christian ministry might be attained, they watched over their young men with a jealous care; and they considered it a sacred duty to caution them, from time to time, against deviating from the simplicity of the gospel, and against conforming themselves, either in style or in sentiment, to the prevailing taste of a godless age.

There was no part of the administration of this Synod more commendable, than the mingled affection and strictness with which they superintended the candidates for the

ministry, throughout every stage of the course of study marked out to them. Those of them that were poor, but deserving, they assisted with occasional donations from their fund. They maintained, in connexion with their Divinity Hall, a class for instructing their young men in the knowledge of philosophy. The curriculum prescribed to those who attended this class, consisted at first of two sessions, but was afterwards extended (in 1767) to three. The teacher was enjoined to spend a portion of each of these sessions, in instructing the students in the knowledge of the languages; and, in a particular manner, he was to spend a considerable part of the first upon the Greek and Latin. When any person made application to be admitted to this class, the presbytery was enjoined to be strict in examining him with regard to his religious experience, his motives in seeking to be admitted as a student, and his fitness for the sacred office. Repeated instances occurred of persons making application, who had not received a regular preparatory education at any other school, and of their being rejected on this ground. Every year, the Synod appointed a committee to examine the students attending the Philosophical Class, and to report to the Synod the progress which each had made. According to the report thus made, they were admitted to the study of divinity, under the Theological Professor; or, if found deficient, they were continued for some time longer in the Philosophical Class. The points on which they were usually examined, were their knowledge of philosophy, their soundness in the faith, their acquaintance with experimental religion, and their motives for prosecuting their studies.

The following report of one of these examining committees is here extracted from the records of Synod, as a specimen of the method of procedure, and of the strictness with which the duty was discharged. The examiners appointed by the Synod, were Messrs Adam Gib, William Mair, Andrew Thomson, John Muckarsie, Alexander Blyth, William Moncrieff, John Walker, James Mitchell, John Heugh, John Wilson, Andrew Bunyan, John Robertson, senior,

and James Alyce. Their report was to the following effect : “ That they had met according to appointment, and examined the persons hereafter mentioned, concerning their knowledge in philosophy, their soundness in the faith, their acquaintance with experimental religion, and their motives for prosecuting their studies : That David Morison, William Drysdale, John Burton, John Muirhead, John Proudfoot, John Smith, and John Young, may be admitted to the study of divinity ; that Alexander Armstrong, Alexander Howieson, John Turnbull, Francis Pringle, James Ramsay, William Barlas, William Bennet, William Laing, John Cuthbert, John Mackie, John Myras, Thomas Simpson, William Mitchell, and George Cowie may be admitted, upon their joining in the bond for renewing our covenants ; that John Graham and Andrew Arrot cannot be admitted, as not having given evidence of their proficiency in the study of philosophy ; that William Buchanan cannot be admitted, as not having given any satisfying reason for his leaving the employment he has been bred to, and betaking himself to his studies ; that William M’Lellan, from North America, considering the peculiarity of his case, and his having given as much satisfaction as could be expected of one in his circumstances, may be admitted upon his satisfying Mr Moncrieff* of his having formally declared his adherence to the Testimony, before any of the judicatories of the Secession, under whose immediate inspection he may be.”

From this report it will be seen, that, before any young man could be admitted to the study of divinity, he was required to “ join in the bond for renewing the covenants.” This was considered by many to be objectionable ; and the Synod was occasionally attacked on the ground of this regulation. They were accused of throwing a snare, by means of it, in the way of youths, some of whom had scarcely passed the period of boyhood, to swear to the truth of a religion, which they had not examined. Upon the recommenda-

* Mr Moncrieff was Professor of Divinity, and Mr James Bishop was teacher, at this time, of the Philosophical Class.

tion of their committee for examining the students, the Synod afterward dispensed with this regulation; and, instead of requiring their young men to swear the bond of the covenants, previous to their being admitted to the study of divinity, they made this one of the conditions of their being taken on trials for licence.

Mr Thomas Mair, of whose deposition from the office of the ministry, an account has been given in a preceding part of this narrative, presented a petition to the Synod, at their meeting in April 1766, craving that the sentence pronounced against him might be disannulled, and declaring his resolution to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to guard against all expressions relating to the points at issue betwixt him and the Synod, that might give offence. In answer to his petition, the Synod appointed the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline to hold meetings with Mr Mair, and to converse with him on those points concerning which he had formerly refused to give satisfaction; and they were to report at next meeting the result of these interviews. Agreeably to this appointment, a meeting of the presbytery was held at Milnathort, in the month of May, which Mr Mair attended; and, after a considerable time spent in conversation, the following proposal was made to him,—“that he should withdraw his dissent against the *Act of the Synod concerning doctrine*, on condition of his being permitted to mark something farther in the minutes, for his own exoneration.” Mr Mair agreed to take this proposal into consideration, and requested that he might be allowed till next meeting of presbytery, to prepare a statement that might be suitable to the purpose.

When the presbytery met at Perth, on the 24th of June, Mr Mair again attended; and, after stating that he had taken the above proposal into his serious consideration, he presented the following statement as the result of his deliberations on the subject:—“That though he was far from prescribing to the reverend Synod, yet he was of opinion there are two things he is persuaded the reverend Synod

can do with honour to themselves, and to the truth, and particularly as these truths are so well guarded in our excellent standards, either that they would find that the truths intended to be cleared and vindicated by this act (viz. the act concerning doctrine), are already well guarded by these standards, and that the endeavour used for any farther guarding of them, by this act, seems not to answer the end of the edification of the body of Christ ; that they, therefore, will not further insist upon that act (as laid), as any term of ministerial and christian communion, or as a confession, or any part of a confession of faith, except as to the precious gospel truths therein contained, as these truths are expressed in the received standards of this church, unto an adherence whereto we are all engaged by most sacred bonds ; or, if that cannot take place, that his dissent be allowed to stand according to the tenor of his address to last Synod ; and he, with all who adhere to his ministry, be received into full communion, without farther challenge on the head of the dissent." The presbytery was urgent that Mr Mair should withdraw his dissent altogether, but Mr Mair was immovable.

These proceedings were reported by the presbytery to the Synod, when they met in the month of August : And the Synod were unanimous in finding, that it was to no purpose to appoint the presbytery to have any farther intercourse with Mr Mair upon the subject. In the month of September, of the following year (1767), another application was made by Mr Mair and his congregation to be restored to the communion of the Synod, which was equally unsuccessful as the preceding one.

In April, 1767, the Synod recommended it to the several presbyteries under their inspection, to endeavour " that covenanting work be essayed " in congregations where ministers have been lately ordained, especially where said work has not been formerly gone about, so soon as it can be regularly overtaken ; also, that presbyteries take special care, both as to young men whom they license, and probationers,

whom they ordain, that they be of the same mind with the Synod, not only as to covenanting in general, but as to the present seasonableness and expediency of proceeding in that duty. At the same meeting, the Synod gave their sanction to the following overture :—That it be recommended to the several presbyteries, to take due care that probationers under their inspection do not violate good order, by preaching in vacancies in the bounds of other presbyteries, unless they have been appointed by their own presbytery, upon an application from that presbytery, in whose bounds the vacancy lies, or by advice of some ministers of said presbytery when providentially in their bounds ; also, that it be recommended to ministers to be cautious and prudent, as to preaching in vacancies without the bounds of their own presbytery.

Notwithstanding the widening circle of the Synod's operations, both in Great Britain and Ireland, the transatlantic missions continued to occupy a considerable share of their attention ; and if the zeal, which they displayed on behalf of their American brethren, had only been seconded by a proper degree of missionary spirit, on the part of the students and probationers under their charge, the number of their congregations on the western side of the Atlantic would have increased rapidly indeed. Few meetings of Synod took place, for a number of years, at which they did not appoint one or more students to be licensed, with a view to the Pennsylvanian mission. But considerable difficulties were experienced by the Synod, in carrying their benevolent intentions into effect, in consequence of the persons whom they appointed refusing to comply. Mention has already been made of the measures which the Synod adopted with a view to secure compliance with their missionary appointments. Presbyteries were prohibited from licensing young men, unless they should express their willingness to go on any missionary enterprise to which they might be appointed. Preachers were to be deprived of their licence, and were not to expect any employment from the Synod, if they should refuse to fulfil any missionary appointment which they might receive, even though it should

be to a foreign land : and those, who were under such an appointment, were declared not to be eligible to any of the vacant congregations in this country. It was scarcely possible for the Synod to do more, in this matter, than they did. That these regulations did not remain a dead letter in their hand, their records sufficiently attest : Frequently did they rebuke, and deprive of licence, those preachers who were contumacious ; and though it appears that, in most instances, the licence was again restored, yet this was not done, until a promise was previously obtained from the penitent preacher, that, for the future, he would be submissive. At that period, the difficulty of obtaining a comfortable settlement at home was not so great as it is at present ; and the prospect of personal comfort, to a labourer in the American vineyard, was not then so inviting as it now is. Such considerations as these, though they do not vindicate, yet tend, in some measure, to account for that reluctance which many of the Secession preachers manifested to go and traverse, in the capacity of missionaries, the sylvan solitudes of the new world.

Before Mr Mason and his two associates, who were sent out by the Synod in the spring of 1761,* reached the shores of America, Mr Alexander Gellatly, minister at Middle Otcarara, in Pennsylvania, died.† Mr Mason, having been sent out in consequence of an application made for him, from a congregation in New York, and having received ordination previous to his departure from Scotland, took his seat as a member of the Pennsylvanian presbytery, immediately on his arrival. After Mr Gellatly's death, there were only two surviving members of presbytery, besides Mr Mason ; these were Messrs James Proudfoot and Matthew Henderson. Of the two probationers, who accompanied Mr Mason, only one (Mr William Annan), became a member of presbytery ; and

* See page 356.

† This individual died on the 12th of April, 1761, after having laboured eight years in Pennsylvania. Honourable mention deserves to be made of him, as being the first Secession missionary to America.

this did not take place till about four years after his arrival. At the meeting of Synod, in April 1762, several communications were received from Mr Mason and his fellow-labourers, craving that three additional missionaries might be sent out. The Synod were exceedingly disposed to give a favourable ear to this application. They appointed Mr William Jamieson, one of their preachers, to go upon this mission, by the earliest opportunity; and Mr Alexander Stewart, minister at Newtonlimavady in Ireland, was appointed to accompany him. Mr Stewart was to remain, till the Synod should give directions about his being continued or recalled.

Scarcely had these appointments been given, when Mr Jamieson received a call from the congregation of Kilwinning;* and when the Synod met in autumn, commissioners appeared from this congregation, craving that Mr Jamieson, instead of being sent to America, should be appointed to labour amongst them. Both Mr Jamieson and Mr Stewart, being present at this meeting, were interrogated why they had not fulfilled their appointment; and the Synod having heard their reasons, agreed, after a considerable discussion, to sustain their excuses, and to release them from their missionary engagements. The call from Kilwinning to Mr Jamieson, was remitted to the Glasgow presbytery, that they might proceed in it, as they should see cause.

Before the Synod separated, they selected from the list of their students two other individuals, whom they ordered to be licensed, and to be sent out to strengthen the hands of the brethren, who were labouring in Pennsylvania; these were Messrs Alexander Pirie and William Marshall. The result of the appointment in Mr Pirie's case has already been noticed. Mr Marshall expressed his willingness to undertake the mission; but stipulated, that, should he find the climate of North America prejudicial to his health, he

* It was immediately after this, that the Synod enacted, that no preacher, who was under an appointment for going to America, should be capable of being proposed as a candidate for any vacant congregation in this country.

should, with the concurrence of the presbytery there, be permitted to return. After Mr Pirie expressed a reluctance to go to America, the Synod appointed Mr James Stewart, student, to accompany Mr Marshall, and to be licensed, after his arrival, by the Pennsylvanian presbytery. What was the scene of Mr Stewart's future labours, I am unable to say: But a short while after this, the Synod received intelligence, that Mr Marshall was ordained minister of the associate congregation, at Deeprun and Nethameny, on the Forks of the Delaware.

In April, 1765, the Synod agreed to send another mission to America; and the persons, whom they selected for this honourable work, were Messrs John France, Robert Cowan, and James Murdoch. Mr France appeared at next meeting of Synod, in the month of September, and stated reasons why he could not fulfil the appointment, and the Synod, after hearing his reasons, ordered the presbytery of Perth and Dunfermline, under whose superintendence he was, to proceed no farther with his trials for licence. At the same meeting, a letter was received from Mr Cowan, stating reasons against his being sent upon the mission. The reasons, which he assigned, were not deemed satisfactory; and the presbytery of Earlston, who had licensed him with a view to his being sent to America, were ordered to summon him before them and deal with him on the subject; and, unless he should give them satisfaction, as to his resolution of fulfilling the appointment of Synod, they were to suspend him from the exercise of his licence, and to summon him to appear at next meeting of Synod. Though Mr France afterward obtained licence, and though Mr Cowan was again placed upon the list of preachers, yet neither of them was employed in missionary labours.* It was with difficulty, also, that the Synod obtained the services of Mr Murdoch for the work to which he was appointed. This difficulty

* Mr France was afterwards ordained over the congregation at Buchlyvie, where he laboured for a number of years respected and useful. Mr Cowan, some time after this, left the Secession and connected himself with the Relief.

was not occasioned by any aversion, which he expressed, to go and preach the gospel abroad, but by the demand that was made for his labours at home. After being licensed, he received a call from the congregation of Lisburn, in Ireland ; and though the Synod were at first averse to sanction such a procedure, it being in direct opposition to their own enactment on the subject, yet they afterward permitted the presbytery to ordain him, on condition of his being sent, after his ordination, on a mission to Nova Scotia. This was accordingly done. Mr Murdoch was ordained by the presbytery of Newtonlimavady, in September 1766, and forthwith proceeded on his mission, agreeably to appointment.

There was laid before the Synod, at their autumnal meeting, in 1767, a representation from the brethren in Pennsylvania, craving that more missionaries might be sent to them ; and stating that they had formed a coalescence with those ministers belonging to the Burgher Secession Synod, who were labouring in the province of New York. This coalition the Synod refused to sanction. They considered that the terms, on which it was formed, were inconsistent with the “ maintenance of the testimony among their hands against the course of the separating brethren :” and they appointed a committee to write to the Pennsylvanian brethren. In the mean time, they delayed farther procedure in the matter, till their next meeting.

When they met in April of the following year, there was laid before them a petition subscribed by fifty-seven individuals in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, earnestly requesting that a minister might be sent to break amongst them the bread of life. In answer to this application, the Synod appointed the Glasgow presbytery to ordain one of their licentiates, and to send him to labour amongst these people. At this meeting, also, a communication was received from the presbytery of Pennsylvania, containing farther information concerning the union with the Burgher missionaries in America. This communication was reckoned still more unsatisfactory than the one formerly sent ; in

as much as the terms of coalescence which it mentioned, were declared to be more inconsistent than the former, with the avowed sentiments of the Synod, in reference to the breach.

A letter, addressed to the moderator, by Mr David Telfar,* was received and read; which was to the following effect:—

“Rev. and Dear Sir,—As the presbytery of Pennsylvania lately sent a petition to your Synod, which was given in to your committee of bills, by Alexander Mowbray, merchant in Edinburgh, this morning, before I came to town, it is expected that it will meet with an agreeable reception. As I was a member of that presbytery, I am the better able to inform you of their affairs; and if you are disposed for peace and agreement in the Lord, I will be exceeding fond to give you such information, by any number of members you may appoint, and prosecute the ends of agreement: And may the Lord grant us to see eye to eye, and to be perfectly united in the same mind. Please communicate this to the Synod, and favour me with your answer, as soon as convenient, addressed to me, at Alexander Mowbray’s, in Foster’s Wynd. I am, Rev. and Dear Sir, yours respectfully,

“DAVID TELFAR.”

EDINBURGH, *6th April*, 1768.

This letter met with an unfavourable reception from the Synod. Mr Telfar was informed, in a reply sent him by the moderator, that his communication had been received; but that the Synod could not hold any correspondence with him, except in the way of receiving satisfaction from him, with a view to the removal of the censure under which he was at present lying; and that as to the terms of agreement, referred to in his letter, they could not take them into consideration. Nothing farther was done, in reference to the Pennsylvanian mission, at this meeting.

In May, 1770, they appointed Messrs John Roger, James Ramsay, and John Proudfoot to be licensed and ordained, and to proceed across the Atlantic to strengthen the hands

† Mr Telfar was minister of the congregation at Bridge-of-Teith, in connexion with the Burgher Synod. He had been sent on a mission to Pennsylvania by that Synod, and was now returned home.

of the brethren, who were labouring in Pennsylvania ; they appointed, also, Messrs James Pierson, and William Carmichael, after receiving licence and ordination, to go to Nova Scotia. At the meeting of September, in the same year, the presbytery of Perth reported, that Messrs Proudfoot and Pierson refused to fulfil the appointment of Synod. Being present, they were dealt with, by the Synod, to comply, but continued contumacious ; wherefore, the Synod ordered the presbytery to sist farther procedure in their trials.* The presbytery of Moyrah and Lisburn, in Ireland, under whose superintendence Mr Carmichael was, represented that it would be impracticable for him to go to Nova Scotia, but that they had appointed Mr James Stewart to go in his stead. After hearing a statement of the case, the Synod relieved Mr Carmichael from his missionary appointment. They also recalled the appointment, which the presbytery had given to Mr Stewart ; and they appointed Mr John Tennant, a member of the presbytery of Newtonlimavady, to undertake a mission to Nova Scotia ; and should there be any insuperable difficulties in his way, to prevent him from undertaking this mission, it was left to the presbytery to appoint any other of their number to go to that colony.

With regard to Messrs Rogers and Ramsay, the presbytery of Glasgow reported, that both these young men had expressed their willingness to go to America, and that they had both received licence and ordination under an express engagement that they would fulfil this appointment. When interrogated by the Synod, why they had not proceeded to their destination, Mr Roger stated that no proper opportunity had yet presented itself, but that he meant to embrace the first that should occur. Mr Ramsay stated some difficulties, that lay in his way ; but after some conversation with him, these difficulties were removed, and he declared his in-

* Both of these persons afterwards received licence, having engaged to fulfil their missionary appointment. But the Synod did not think proper to employ them as missionaries.

tention of proceeding, before next meeting of Synod, to America.

As the presbytery of Pennsylvania had formed a coalescence with the Burgher brethren in that province, the Synod considered whether it would be proper, in these circumstances, for Messrs Roger and Ramsay to connect themselves with that presbytery. After some discussion, it was agreed to enjoin the presbytery to erase from their record every thing relating to their coalescence with the Burgher brethren. If this injunction should be complied with, Messrs Roger and Ramsay were to take their seats in the presbytery; if the presbytery should prove refractory, then these two brethren, along with any others that should entertain similar views with themselves, were empowered to constitute themselves into a new presbytery. It would appear that the order of Synod was complied with; for at the next meeting Mr Roger's name was inserted in their roll, as a member of the presbytery of Pennsylvania. It was intimated, at the same meeting, that Mr John Smith had been ordained by the presbytery of Stirling, and had proceeded to the same destination. He, too, was enrolled as a member of the Pennsylvanian presbytery.

Mr Ramsay was taken to task for not having fulfilled his engagement. In vindication of himself, he read a long paper containing reasons for non-compliance. These the Synod refused to sustain; and, as he declared, in peremptory terms, that he would not undertake the mission, they did not deem it proper to insist any farther upon his complying; but they expressed their disapprobation of his conduct, and suspended him from the exercise of his ministry. Mr Ramsay protested against this sentence, and declared that he would hold his ministry to be as valid as if no such sentence had been pronounced. But the Synod were resolved to make their authority be respected. They cited Mr Ramsay to appear before them at their next sederunt, and obliged him to withdraw his protest. Not content with this, they ordered a statement to be prepared, of the various grounds of offence

which Mr Ramsay had given, and were proceeding to adopt ulterior measures, which would in all probability have terminated in his deposition, had he not, by a timely submission, and an ample acknowledgment, averted their displeasure. Immediately after this, he received a call from a congregation in Glasgow, and was soon after inducted as their minister. This may help to account, in some measure, for the strong aversion which he manifested to go to America.

During the period that the Synod were thus laudably engaged in providing for the spiritual wants of their brethren in America, a variety of miscellaneous matters, connected with the state of the church at home, occupied their attention. In the month of May 1769, Mr Gib introduced an overture, of considerable length, in which it was proposed, first, that the Synod should publish an act "bearing their homologation, and constant profession of the whole state and management of the Secession Testimony," as the same was set forth in the various public acts and deeds, emitted from time to time by the Associate Presbytery and Synod; secondly, That they should either embody in the same document, or publish in a separate act, "a vindication and justification of the Secession Testimony, against the shameful and wicked attempt which was made, about fourteen years ago, for defaming and destroying the same, in a large overture, by the pretended synod of the separating brethren, concerning pretended errors in the Judicial Testimony, and other deeds which had been passed by the Associate Presbytery." The acts proposed to be consolidated by this overture, amounted to no fewer than twenty; and publishing them in one document, would certainly have been a great improvement. It would have rendered them more accessible to the people, and it would have presented the grounds and proceedings of the Secession in a more concentrated and effective form before the public.

To induce the Synod to adopt this overture, Mr Gib presented a variety of reasons, which were appended to the same paper. Of these the following were the chief:—

“ First, According to the course of matters, even things most memorable, and which ought to continue fresh in people’s view, do readily become, in process of time, somehow antiquated ; and, as it is now above thirty years since the Secession Testimony was first stated, and a good many years since the last of these acts and deeds above mentioned took place, it seems to be high time that the said Testimony, in the whole bygone state and management of it, should be, upon the matter, renewed or set forth in its original freshness, by such an act as is now moved for.” The second reason was, “ The dismal opposition to the said Testimony, made and managed by the separating brethren, and their congregations.”

His third reason was stated in the following terms :—
“ Some years ago, a motion arose among some, on the side of the separating brethren, for a coalescence of those called Burghers and Antiburghers, such as was to proceed upon a burial of the Secession Testimony, according to the whole state and management of it, in opposition to the course of the separating brethren ; and the said motion did spread like wild fire through different parts of the country, so as to produce numerous and disorderly meetings of people on both sides, for conversation and debate upon the subject : In reality, according to the nature of the thing, for concerting and accomplishing the burial of the Secession Testimony, which affair had a manifest tendency, and it is to be feared a good deal of success, for confounding and corrupting the minds of people under the inspection of the Synod, with regard to their witnessing profession. Wherefore, it seems high time for this Synod to make a proper stand against this whole stratagem and defection, by such an act as is now moved for.” Another reason mentioned by him was the ignorance and forgetfulness of the Secession Testimony, and a spirit of neutrality concerning it, which prevailed among many of the present generation, under the inspection of the Synod ; and he further added, “ The generality of the ministers of this Synod have been brought into it since the state and

management of the Secession Testimony, in most of the acts and deeds above mentioned took place. Wherefore it seems high time that these ministers should expressly serve themselves heir to their witnessing predecessors in this Synod, and that an express manifestation should be made of the Associate Synod continuing still really, as well as nominally, the same, by such an act as is now moved for."

This overture the Synod agreed to consider at a private sederunt; but, after conversing on the subject, they were found to be much divided in sentiment concerning it. Some thought that the consideration of it ought to be delayed, and that an opportunity ought to be afforded to the members of the different presbyteries to weigh the matter in their own minds, before they were required to come to any decision. Others were of opinion, that they ought to proceed without delay to take some steps with regard to the overture. A vote was put, *Proceed unto some step upon this overture?* or, *Delay till next meeting?* when it carried, by a considerable majority, *Proceed*. After this vote was passed, it was moved, "That they should agree to proceed according to the whole of the overture now before them." In opposition to this, another motion was made, "That the Synod should appoint a committee for drawing up an overture in vindication and defence of the Judicial Testimony, the acts concerning the doctrine of grace, and the renovation of our solemn covenants, and the answers to Mr Nairn, with the declaration and defence thereto subjoined, in opposition to the various attacks which have been made upon the same, leaving the farther consideration of the overture till afterwards." This latter motion was carried.* and Mr Gib craved that it might be marked, "That as he had voted on the first question, *Proceed*, so he had voted on the second question, *Agree*, though with the concurrence of only one

* The committee appointed to prepare this overture, consisted of the following persons :—Messrs William Graham (moderator), Andrew Thomson, Alexander Troup, David Wilson senior, William Moncrieff, John Goodlet, John Heugh, John Wilson, and James Morison.

elder, because he reckoned that the reverend Synod ought to have given some present and proper entertainment to the whole of the overture proposed, as it only aims at an acknowledging, sustaining, and maintaining of the whole by-gone state and management of the Secession Testimony; that they ought to have done so, as a necessary piece of faithfulness, in behalf of the whole of the Lord's cause among their hands." To this statement of Mr Gib, the elder referred to, Thomas Beveridge from Paisley, declared his adherence.

This business was again pressed upon the attention of the Synod, at their meeting in May of the following year. It was then moved, that the Synod should consider what they were to do concerning the overture laid before them at a former meeting. Inquiry was made if the committee formerly appointed had prepared the draught of an act, according to their appointment. The answer returned was, that the committee had not yet met, nor done any thing in the affair. It was agreed to postpone the farther consideration of this matter till their next meeting. Against this decision Mr Gib entered the following protest:—" I do hereby protest, for myself, and in behalf of all the members of this Synod, and of the Secession body, who shall see meet to adhere, that I am to be considered as still persisting, and as resolved (through grace), still to persist in a full adherence to the whole state and management of the Secession Testimony, which is referred to in the foresaid overture, particularly as to all the Synodical wrestlings and contendings for the same, in opposition to the course of the separating brethren, and of Mr Mair; and that I am for having the whole acts and deeds referred to in the said overture, considered as still in force, all of the same authoritative vigour as at first. Moreover, I do hereby protest, for myself, and in behalf of all the members of this Synod, who shall see meet to adhere; that I cannot acknowledge, nor have any concern with the business of the foresaid committee, because I conceive that, as stated in connexion with the foresaid delay, it stands in opposition to any proper acknowledgment of the said

Synodical wrestlings and contendings for about twenty-four years bygone, leaving the same to be considered as some way antiquated : Protesting also, that my continuing to sit in this Synod, ought not to be reckoned an acknowledgment of its present condition, further than as may well enough consist with what is above expressed ; or further than as it really continues to be still the same Associate Synod ; so as I may not be answerable for any thing now taking place therein to the contrary. And upon all this I take instruments, craving that the same may be recorded in the minutes of Synod, and that I may be allowed extracts. ADAM GIB."

Messrs John Robertson, James Morison, John Anderson, and Alexander Oliver, desired to have it marked, that " they craved to have the door left open till next meeting, that they might offer what they thought proper for their exoneration in this matter." When the next meeting arrived, a motion was made that the Synod should consider the overture, but the consideration of it was still deferred till another meeting. Messrs Robertson and Morison then declared that they adhered to the protest formerly taken by Mr Gib.

The coolness which the Synod displayed with regard to this overture, and certain occurrences connected with the erection of a new congregation at Leith, alienated the mind of Mr Gib, and led him to discontinue, for a season, his attendance in the Synod. At their spring meeting, in 1771, the Synod, finding that he had not taken his seat amongst them, and that, with the exception of the first sederunt, he had absented himself during the whole of the preceding meeting, sent some of the brethren to request him to attend, and to give reasons for his absence. Mr Gib appeared ; and, being interrogated by the moderator, why he had withdrawn himself, he gave in the following paper, craving that it might be recorded :—" I have for some time been labouring under great difficulties about continuing to take a seat in this reverend Synod, unto any farther interfering with their business ; because, from the spirit which I apprehend has been working within these five years bygone,

I am now much at a loss to see any proper door remaining open for my farther usefulness in this court ; and because several things in the conduct of this Synod, during that time, about which my peculiar circumstances have obliged me to keep silence, and particularly some of their proceedings at last meeting, are now become very straitening to my conscience, as to sitting silent under them ; and because several things in the conduct of some ministers of this Synod during the same time, about which I have, in like manner, been obliged to keep silence, have also become very straitening to my conscience, as to a continued acknowledgment of membership with them in this court, without satisfaction.

“ At the same time, I cannot get myself reconciled to a particular explaining, as matters presently stand, of the grievances above referred to, in order to a particular satisfaction concerning them, unless the reverend Synod shall oblige me to it, by a prosecution upon a libel, instead of yielding to what I shall now propose, or of overlooking my absence ; because I can see no probability of any good effect that such an explanation can now have ; but apprehend the only consequence must be the kindling of a new fire and contention to farther mischief, which I cannot allow myself to be a voluntary occasion of.

“ But it is a matter most grievous to me, all circumstances considered, to find myself shut out from this reverend Synod ; so that I am rather willing to put up, in the mean time, with any thing that may bear but as it were a shadow of present exoneration ; and the lowest measure of this I can think of is, that I get this present representation engrossed in the minutes of Synod, as a standing evidence that my continuing to sit and act in this Synod, silent as hitherto about the said grievances, shall not be considered as precluding me from freedom to explain, and insist for satisfaction, about the same hereafter, if I shall live to see an opportunity for doing so, with any probability of a good effect, when the Lord shall be with us, and we with him, as in former times.”

This paper gave rise to some discussion ; but the Synod

agreed to allow it to be engrossed in their record. They also agreed to express their dissatisfaction with Mr Gib in having so long retained in his breast the scruples referred to, without stating them, and in withdrawing from the Synod without assigning any reasons till called for; and they found fault with the mode in which he had expressed his difficulties in the paper now given in. After considering all the circumstances of the case, they deemed it expedient to sist all farther procedure in the matter at present, reserving to themselves the power of calling upon Mr Gib to explain himself more particularly hereafter, if they should see cause. They resolved, at the same time, that, at an early sederunt of next meeting, they would consider the overture which had been laid before them in May 1769.

When the Synod met in August, 1771, they entered upon the consideration of the overture; and, after a long discussion, the following motion was carried by a large majority:—"That the Synod lay aside the overture, because, though they heartily approve of all our received and sworn-to principles, yet they cannot see the necessity, propriety, and expediency of bringing them into question, and of passing such an act as the overture proposes, while all the acts and deeds mentioned in said overture are standing acts and deeds, in as full force as when they were passed." Mr Gib, who voted with the minority on this question, craved to have his dissent marked, in the following terms:—"I hereby adhere unto, and upon the matter renew, the protestation which I entered upon this subject at the meeting of Synod in May last year, from this consideration, that a consistency of the latter part of the motion now gone into, in an ingenuous sense thereof,—that a consistency of this with the laying aside of the overture, and with the reasonings by which the matter has been brought to this issue,—is a thing absolutely beyond my comprehension." To this dissent, three ministers (Messrs John Robertson, sen., James Morison, and Alexander Oliver) and two elders (Messrs George Anderson and George Ford) declared their adherence.

It is pleasing to record the christian sympathy which the members of the Synod displayed for the widows and orphans of those ministers who had been removed by death from the scene of their labours. In no part of their proceedings did they evince more of the spirit of their Master, than in the laudable exertions which they made to provide for the temporal comfort of these objects of their benevolence. Notice has already been taken of the formation of a fund,* to which every congregation was required to contribute, and the proceeds of which were applied solely to the relief of ministers' widows, and their fatherless children. As this fund was not so productive as the exigencies of the case required, a small additional allowance was occasionally given to each widow out of the general fund of the Association. The Synod were of opinion, that it is the duty of every congregation to make provision, according to their ability, for the widows and orphans of their deceased ministers, should they be left in destitute circumstances. The following overture was accordingly introduced, and received the sanction of the Synod, in September, 1772:—"That in regard the word of God, former acts of the church, and even reason itself, require that the widows and fatherless children of ministers should be provided for, in a decent manner, with regard to the necessities of life, the Synod recommend it to the several congregations under their inspection, where any of the Lord's servants have been, or shall be, called off by death, to make some provision, according to their respective abilities, for their widows and children: But the Synod declare, that this recommendation shall be without any prejudice to their former act, requiring all their congregations to contribute for the provision of the widows and children of deceased ministers; and that, where any congregation makes provision for the widow or children of its deceased minister, it shall, in that case, be exempted from contributing in conjunction with other congregations, according to said act."

The clerk was appointed to send an extract of this act to

* P. 347.

each of the presbyteries, to be laid by them before all the congregations. Notwithstanding these regulations, the fund still continued inadequate; and a few years afterward, an additional act was passed, whereby all the ministers connected with the Synod in Britain were required to subscribe, in their respective presbyteries, such a sum to the widows' fund, as they should be able and disposed to give; and presbyteries were to render a particular account to the Synod of the sum which each congregation was required to contribute to the same object.

At the same meeting at which the above overture was adopted, the Synod, with a view to render their public fund more productive, enacted the following regulations:—

First, That there be no public collections in time coming, by the authority of this Synod, but one each year, in each of their congregations, for their public fund; and that this collection be made annually on the first Sabbath of April, or on the first opportunity afterward (where there is a vacancy on that day), without enjoining any other extraordinary collection.

Second, That the whole of the collection made in each congregation, for that purpose, be given to the Synod's fund, without any deduction by the sessions, except the ordinary amount of collection for the poor.

Third, That all the ministers of the Synod be careful to have these annual collections made in their several congregations, so as to have the money brought or sent up, at one or other of the meetings of Synod each year; with certification otherwise of being specially censured by the Synod for their neglect.

Fourth, That a particular state of deficiencies, as to these collections, be laid before the Synod at each meeting, together with a state of the money in their fund.

Fifth, That the said fund be applied not only to the ordinary purposes of training up young men for the ministry, but also for missions, and for the relief of particular congregations, so far as it can serve these purposes.

The collections made in Ireland were to be applied, in the first place, to defray the expenses of such of the brethren from that kingdom, as should attend the several meetings of Synod.

At this period, the Secession congregations were but thinly scattered in the north of Scotland. One cause of this was the difficulty of procuring preachers who were acquainted with the Gaelic language. With the exception of Mr Patrick Buchanan, who was settled at Nigg, none of the ministers belonging to the Synod appear to have been able to address the Highlanders in their native dialect. Mr Thomas Darg, a Gaelic licentiate, was sent to labour in the north; and having received a call from a congregation at Wick, in Caithness, consisting chiefly of Highlanders, he was ordained amongst them in September, 1771. In consequence of his ordination in that remote district, the standard of the Secession was planted almost on the northernmost point of Scotland; for an application for a supply of sermon, in the Gaelic language, was soon after made by a number of people in the town of Thurso; and a similar application was made from Highlanders residing in the town and neighbourhood of Nairn. The Synod authorised their Professor, Mr Moncrieff, to look out for a few students, who might be acquainted with the native dialect of the Highlanders, and to send them to reside for a season in the North, that they might improve themselves in the Celtic language; and the necessary expenses were to be defrayed out of the public fund. It was also declared, that any students who should receive such an appointment, and who should refuse to yield compliance, were not to expect any farther encouragement from the Synod.

In the summer of 1774, Messrs Howieson and Laing, two licentiates, who had acquired such a knowledge of the Gaelic, as enabled them to preach (though imperfectly) in that language, were despatched to the North, and laboured chiefly amongst the Gaelic population, at the following stations,—Thurso, Nairn, and Strathdearn. The former of these

preachers received a call from a congregation at Howford, in the neighbourhood of Nairn, and was ordained amongst them, by the presbytery of Elgin, in April, 1778. The same cause which prevented the Secession from obtaining an early entrance into the Highlands of Scotland,—viz. the want of Gaelic preachers,—has prevented it from ever obtaining an extensive footing in these mountainous regions. Notwithstanding the encouragement which has been repeatedly held out to young Highlanders to offer themselves for this work, the Secession Synods have hitherto been baffled in their attempts to procure a sufficient number of well qualified persons, to enable them to carry on missionary operations, to any considerable extent, among their Celtic countrymen.

In August, 1778, the Synod took into consideration a subject of much importance to the respectability and efficiency of the christian ministry, viz. the maintenance given by the congregations to those who laboured amongst them in the gospel. At that period, the doctrine of voluntary contribution for religious purposes, was comparatively new in this country ; and as the first generation of Seceders had been trained up (at least the greater portion of them) within the pale of the Establishment, where no pecuniary effort had been required of them, it was not, of course, to be expected that, after joining the Secession, they would immediately lay aside the habit of *non-giving*, to which they had been accustomed, and all at once imbibe, in its full extent, that spirit of liberality which became them, as christians, to cherish. Besides, a considerable proportion of those who left the Establishment, and joined the ranks of the Secession, were persons in humble circumstances of life, and, however willing they might be to contribute, they had little to give ; and, besides contributing to the maintenance of their ministers, there were many other objects, of a benevolent and religious nature, to which they were required to give their support. It need not therefore excite surprise, that the stipends given by many of the Secession congregations to their

ministers, should be found very inadequate ; and it may reasonably be supposed, that the members of Synod, in calling the attention of their people to this subject, were influenced no less by a sense of duty, than by a regard to their own personal comfort and respectability.

An overture to the following effect was introduced, and the Synod was required to give it their sanction :—“ As it hath pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe ; as a gospel ministry is a standing ordinance in the church, appointed by our God and Redeemer ; and as our Lord hath ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel,—it becomes the duty of every church, and has been the practice of every pure one, to take care that this ordinance of Christ be observed, and his laws respecting it obeyed : And whereas it is apprehended, that there are various congregations under the inspection of this Synod, which are greatly defective in supporting the gospel among them, according to their numbers, abilities, and engagements in the call which they have subscribed to their ministers :

“ It is therefore humbly overtured to the Reverend Synod, that they would take this matter into their consideration, and that an act be made by them to the following purpose, or with such alterations and amendments as shall be thought necessary :—1. That the Synod appoint the several presbyteries under their inspection, to inquire into the state of every congregation in their bounds respectively,—also how the gospel is supported in each of these congregations, according to its numbers and abilities. 2. That the presbyteries be appointed also to inquire how public charges about sacramental solemnities are defrayed in the said congregations, and what is usually done for that purpose. 3. That the presbyteries be further appointed to inquire, whether, in those congregations where no glebe is provided for the minister, any thing is done by the people toward furnishing him with a horse, in his attendance upon presbyteries, synods, and sacramental occasions. 4. That the several

presbyteries be enjoined to take effectual care, that the probationers under their inspection be properly supported by the congregations, where they are appointed by them to preach. 5. That every presbytery be appointed to bring a minute of their proceedings in this matter to the first meeting of Synod, after such act shall be made."

In the course of the discussion which this overture occasioned, some proposed that it should be passed into an act : Others were of opinion that it would be sufficient to recommend the matters contained in it to the attention of the several presbyteries. This latter opinion preponderated ; and when the question was put, *Enact*, or *Recommend*? it carried by a considerable majority, *Recommend*. A recommendation to the above effect was accordingly given to the several presbyteries, by the moderator, from the chair.

Some time before this, an act had been passed by the British Parliament, "for better regulating the government of Quebec," in which a legal establishment had been given to the Roman Catholic religion throughout the province of Lower Canada. And in the session of Parliament, this same year, another act was passed, repealing certain penal statutes affecting the papists in England ; and, in consequence of the repeal, the English Catholics were permitted (on taking an oath prescribed by the act) the free exercise of their religion, and also to open schools for the instruction of their youth. These proceedings were viewed with alarm by many throughout the country : Government, by the passing of these acts, was considered as giving encouragement to popery, both at home and abroad. In this alarm the members of the Synod participated, along with many of their fellow subjects ; and a committee was appointed by them, at this meeting, to prepare a testimony against the legal encouragement which had been given to popery. At next sederunt, the committee presented a draught of this testimony, which, after receiving several corrections and amendments, was approved of, and ordered to be immediately published.

In this document, the Synod characterise these enactments

“as inconsistent both with the principles of our holy religion, and with the safety of the state ; and as having a tendency to weaken the protestant interest, by reviving and strengthening a popish faction,—the irreconcilable enemies of the protestant religion and liberties.” They pronounce the making of such laws to be “inconsistent with the duty of christian and protestant rulers, contrary to the laws of God, greatly dishonouring to the Redeemer, and a further progress in the public and national apostacy from the Reformation.” They also declare, that they “detest the principle of persecution for conscience sake, or of denying the enjoyment of natural rights to such, whose principles or practices are not inconsistent with the peace and order of civil society. But they cannot consider those who own unlimited subjection to a foreign head, namely, the Roman Antichrist,—who believe in the infallibility of a church which has decreed it lawful to keep no faith with those whom they call heretics,—who believe in the power of the pope to absolve them from all allegiance to princes, and in the doctrine of papal dispensations, or jesuitical equivocations,—and whose known principles are destructive to the civil and religious rights of mankind : they can never consider such persons as entitled to such public favour, or that they can be viewed as good or faithful subjects of any protestant state, notwithstanding any oaths they can swear to the contrary. On the account of the idolatry, blasphemy, and persecuting cruelty, inseparable from that religion, do they give this testimony against it.”

For the British government to give a civil establishment to popery in Canada, was certainly a most objectionable proceeding, and deserved all the reprobation which the Synod, in common with all good protestants, pronounced upon it. But to repeal the penal statutes that pressed upon the English Catholics, and to permit this class of his Majesty's subjects to enjoy the free exercise of their religion, and to open seminaries for the instruction of their youth, so long as they conducted themselves in a legal and peaceable manner, was

a step no less sanctioned by true religion and common equity, than it was consonant to the dictates of sound policy. There can be no greater evil in a country, and no greater hindrance to the prosperity of the church of Christ, than when one class of religionists attempt, by penal enactments, to prevent another class from worshipping God according to the dictates of their conscience. The Synod were no doubt sincere, when they declared "that they detested the principle of persecution for conscience sake." But, like the great majority of the protestants of that period, they did not account it "persecution for conscience sake," to shut up the churches and schools of the Roman Catholics, and to prevent that proscribed class from worshipping God in the manner which their conscience dictated. The entertaining of these views, however, was the fault not so much of the men, as of the age in which they lived. The result has shown, that the fears which they cherished with regard to the evil effects of such a measure, were unfounded ; and the experience of more than half a century has proved, that neither the safety of the community, nor the interests of religion, are endangered by spreading the shield of toleration over the votaries of the church of Rome, any more than by spreading it over the adherents of the protestant faith.

Intelligence reached the Synod, that some of the Pennsylvanian brethren had formed themselves into a presbytery distinct from the presbytery of Pennsylvania, and had assumed to themselves the designation of the Associate Presbytery of New York. It was understood, that Mr John Mason was the person with whom this movement originated, though no distinct information had been received, who the brethren were that had connected themselves with the new American presbytery. The Synod declared that they could acknowledge no other presbytery in America but the one already existing in Pennsylvania ; and they required the brethren there to send home a particular account of the change that had taken place, that they might judge con-

cerning it. This presbytery had lately received an accession, by Mr James Clarkson being added to their number. *

Mr Mason was a strenuous advocate for a coalition with the "separating brethren." Some communications had been received from him by persons in this country, in which he had used strong language concerning the dispute carried on betwixt the two Secession Synods. He had characterised it as "the dry, the fruitless, the disgracing, the pernicious controversy about the burgess-oath;" and the following words, published by Mr Archibald Hall, as proceeding from a member of the Synod, were ascribed to him:—"This controversy has done infinite injury to the cause of God in Scotland, and wherever it has shed its malignant influences. For my own part, I cannot reflect upon it without shame and perplexity. Though we differ only about the meaning of some burgess-oaths and some acts of parliament, our mutual opposition has been as fierce as probably it would have been had we differed about the most important points of christianity. The infatuation we have fallen into will amaze posterity." At a previous meeting, Mr Gib had founded upon this language a charge against Mr Mason, "of his having grievously defamed the Lord's gracious and memorable interposal for the support of the Secession interest, in the matter of the foresaid controversy, horribly reproaching the appearance which he has enabled this Synod to make, for his interest, against the separating brethren, as if it were an infatuation, and dreadfully breaking the bond of his ordination vows." He had also proposed, that the Synod should erase Mr Mason's name from their roll, and no longer acknowledge him to be one of their number, till they should have an opportunity of bringing his case to a proper trial;

* This person was ordained by the Glasgow presbytery on the 14th of July, 1772, and was sent out, immediately after his ordination, to America. Mr Martin, a member of the presbytery of Moyrah and Lisburne, followed him, during the course of next year, to the same destination; but his name (for what reason I know not) was not added to the presbytery's roll.

and that an injunction should be sent out to the presbytery of Pennsylvania, "to lay him aside from a seat amongst them," until they should receive from him proper satisfaction for his conduct.

This motion, when first brought forward in May, 1776, the Synod had refused to entertain. They did not even think proper to record it in their minutes; and Mr Gib was so much dissatisfied with their conduct in this matter, as well as with their rejection of his overture brought forward in May, 1769, that he again absented himself from the meetings of Synod. For four years he kept himself aloof, and gave no countenance (at least by his presence) to their proceedings. They were again obliged to deal with him, and to call upon him to give reasons for his absence. This business was taken up by them, at their meeting in August, 1780. An extra-judicial conference was held with him; and being required to state why he had not attended the Synod for some years past, he mentioned a variety of grievances, of both a personal and a public nature, which, he conceived, "had shut the door" against his farther usefulness in the Synod. Messrs Moncrieff, Morison, and Bruce, were appointed a committee, to prepare an overture, agreeable to what had passed in the conference; and the result was, that the committee recommended to the Synod to adopt the overture proposed by Mr Gib, in May, 1769, and to entertain the proposal made by him in May, 1776, concerning Mr Mason; both of which were done accordingly. The Synod declared "their homologation and constant profession of the whole Secession Testimony, first among the hands of the Associate Presbytery, and afterwards among the hands of the Associate Synod." They also struck the name of Mr Mason out of their roll, "as no longer entitled to a seat for being an active member among them, until there should be an opportunity for bringing his case to a formal trial." These things being done, Mr Gib agreed to forget all personal grievances, and to resume his seat as formerly.

At the spring meeting of the following year (1781), the

Synod took into consideration the state of their Theological Seminary; and complaints having been made by the examining committees, that the attendance of the students upon the prelections of the Professor of Divinity, was neither so full nor so regular as it ought to be, the following regulations, drawn up by the presbytery of Stirling, were adopted:—

“ That, in ordinary cases, no students of divinity shall be taken upon trials for licence, till they have attended the Divinity Class for five, or at least four, sessions after they have been admitted; That the number of sessions they attend shall be reckoned from the time they have finished their philosophical studies, at least so far as their prosecution of any of the branches thereof, at any of the Universities, shall not interfere with their attendance on the Divinity Class above three weeks; That, in appointing young men to be taken on trials for licence, they will (*cæteris paribus*) appoint those first who have been most regular in their attendance upon the Divinity Class; That, in ordinary cases, such students as have not regularly attended the Class, shall not be appointed to be taken on trials, till the time of their attendance, put together, shall amount to three complete sessions, beside what account the Synod shall see cause to call them to, in case their non-attendance shall be found to proceed from negligence or carelessness; And the Synod recommend it to Mr Moncrieff, to continue to keep an exact account of the time that the students under his care have attended each session, and to have respect to that as well as to the number of sessions they have attended, in recommending them to be taken on trials for licence; And the Synod recommend it to the several ministers, under whose inspection the students are, to endeavour to be acquainted with them, to be assisting to them in their studies, by their advice and otherwise, and to be ready to give an account to the Synod of what application they give to their studies, as well as of their character and deportment; And the Synod enjoin all the students of divinity under their inspection, to be regular and exemplary in their deportment, in the places

where they reside; to be diligent in the prosecution of their studies, both during the time of their attendance upon the Class and during the vacation, and to cultivate acquaintance with the ministers in whose bounds they reside."

CHAPTER VIII.

Dr Robertson's policy in the General Assembly. Deplorable effects of it. Scenes of strife in the church-courts. Forced induction of Mr Thomson into the parish of St Ninians. Singular address by a moderator. Violent settlements at Kirk of Shotts, and at Eaglesham. The Smytonite controversy. Diversity of opinion about lifting the bread at the ordinance of the Supper. Mr Smyton insists upon uniformity. The matter brought before the Synod. Mr Gib protests against the Synod entertaining the question. The Synod recommend forbearance. Mr Smyton proves contumacious. Is suspended from the exercise of his ministry. Resolutions of Synod upon the subject. Meetings held about a union between the Burgher and Antiburgher Synods. Petitions from the Irish presbyteries on the subject. Conduct of the presbyteries disapproved of by the Synod. The Irish brethren not satisfied. Send up a representation and complaint to the Synod. Desire to be regarded as a sister church. The Synod unfavourable to the proposal. Philosophical Class removed to Edinburgh. Union in America betwixt the Burgher and Antiburgher brethren and Reformed Presbytery. Condemned by the Synod. Two of the American brethren refuse to coalesce. The Synod send an address to them. Recognise them as the presbytery of Pennsylvania. Send out a missionary to them. Petition from the congregation of Pictou in Nova Scotia. Mr James D. Macgregor sent to labour among them. Death of Mr William Moncrieff. Mr Archibald Bruce elected Professor of Divinity. Proposal to have a General Synod, with four provincial synods. Proposal adopted. Regulations of the General Synod. Regulations respecting provincial synods. Regulations concerning preachers.

THE state of affairs in the national church was, at this period, peculiarly bad. From the year 1763 till 1781, Dr Robertson bore the chief sway in the General Assembly; and, by his dextrous management, aided by the support

which he received from successive administrations, he had secured a complete triumph to the principles of the moderate party. The golden age of *Moderatism* was now arrived. The law of patronage was carried into effect with inexorable rigour, and the rights of the people were laid completely prostrate. During the eighteen years that this distinguished individual reigned, he exerted all his influence to establish the doctrine, "That a presentation, adhered to by the presentee, should in all cases be made effectual, without any reservation founded on the merits of the call, or on the number of heritors, elders, or parishioners who concurred or dissented." * This was the doctrine in reference to the settlement of ministers, which he publicly maintained, and on which he acted; and, by means of the votes of the Assembly, with the occasional assistance of his Majesty's troops, horse and foot, he finally succeeded in getting it established as the law and practice of the church. Yet, while such were the sentiments which he avowed, and which he endeavoured to make good at the point of the bayonet, this same person, with singular inconsistency, coincided with the rest of his brethren, moderate and anti-moderate, in giving instructions, every year, to the Commission to petition Parliament for the abolition of patronage. The celebrated clause which formed part of the Assembly's instructions to their Commission, for a period of forty-eight years, † was to the following effect:—"And the Assembly do farther empower and direct the said Commission, to make application to the King and Parliament, for redress of the grievance of patronage, in case a favourable opportunity for so doing, shall occur, during the subsistence of this Commission." ‡

* Moncrieff's Life of Dr Erskine, Appendix, p. 464.

† From 1736 till 1784, when the favourite clause was expunged.

‡ The following account of the Commission of the General Assembly (extracted from the Appendix to the Life of Dr Erskine), is here inserted, for the information of my readers:—"The General Assembly annually appoints a committee, which usually consists of all the members of Assembly, with full power to decide causes which the Assembly have not had time to discuss, and which they remit to this committee, which has the name of "The Commission of the General Assembly;" adding besides, instructions to watch

A writer* to whom reference has repeatedly been made in the course of this narrative, extols the *prudence* of Dr Robertson, in cajoling the Assembly, by agreeing to insert in the annual instructions to the Commission, a clause so much at variance with the system of government which he pursued. While this ecclesiastical ruler enforced the law of patronage upon reclaiming congregations, with a rigour hitherto unknown in the Scottish Church, he consented to petition annually the legislature for the abolition of this obnoxious law, not because he had any wish that it should be abolished, but because he knew that, in petitioning for the abolition of it, he was humouring "the popular prejudices."† By the determined manner in which he wielded the power of the Assembly, in carrying into effect the settlement of ministers, in the face of the most violent opposition on the part of the people, he did more than any other leader that had preceded him, for converting the moderation of a

over every thing in which the general interest of the church appears to be concerned. The Commission has full power to decide finally in the causes remitted to them ; and no appeal can be taken against their decisions. There is, however, a regulation which provides a remedy against any supposed injustice in the sentences of the Commission, which is equivalent, in its practical effects, to the power of appealing. There may be a complaint at the instance either of a party, or of a member of the court, brought to the next Assembly, against any sentence of a Commission, in which it can be stated, that the Commission has exceeded its powers ; and, on such a complaint, the Assembly may reverse or alter the sentence complained of. The Commission has four stated meetings in the year, in May, August, November, and March. The Moderator of Assembly, on the application of a certain number of members, may call an extraordinary meeting, when any unusual circumstance requires it. The quorum of the Commission is thirty-one, of whom twenty-one must be ministers."

* Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood.

† Such is the account which the reverend baronet gives of the *prudent* management of Dr Robertson. He represents this leader of the Assembly as making it the chief object of his administration, throughout the whole of his public life, to rivet firmly the yoke of patronage, as if it were a great boon to the nation ; and, that he might the more successfully accomplish his object, he is described as wheedling the minority in the church, by co-operating with them, in presenting an annual petition for that which he really did not wish should be granted. It is truly grievous to find a writer of such respectability speaking in terms of apparent commendation of conduct so disingenuous and pitiful.

call into a mere mockery, and the solemnity of an ordination, into a scene of tumult and bloodshed. Matters had gone on from evil to worse in the Establishment, until there was now an utter disregard of the wishes of the people, in the appointment of their pastors. The language of the Assembly was, " The presentation must take effect, whether the people will or not ;" and the consequences of this determination were most disgraceful and distressing.

The following is by no means an overcharged picture of what took place in many of the parishes, when the death or removal of a minister rendered it necessary that a vacant charge should be filled up. A certain time having been permitted to elapse, after the parish had been declared to be vacant, an agent appeared at the bar of the presbytery, and laid on the table a presentation from the patron, in favour of a particular candidate. The presentation being examined, and found to be duly authenticated, was sustained. The candidate's letter of acceptance was also received along with it, and recorded. A day was appointed for the moderation of a call in the vacant congregation. At the time and place appointed, the presbytery appeared, and a brother preached. After sermon, the object for which the presbytery had met, was stated ; a call was produced, with the name of the presentee inserted in it, and the people were required to come forward and affix to it their signatures. In answer to the invitation thus given, probably the patron, or his factor, one or two heritors, and a few friends and dependents, took the pen and subscribed their names. The rest of the people either departed in disgust, or, as was most frequently the case, produced a protest, and laid it upon the presbytery's table, declaring that the presentee was not the object of their choice, and that they would not submit to have an intruder ordained amongst them. By this movement the presbytery were placed in a situation of perplexity. They were at a loss whether to give their suffrages in favour of the patron or the people. Sometimes they decided in favour of the one, and sometimes in favour of the other ; but, on whichever

side the decision was given, one or other of the parties protested and appealed ; and the matter, after a delay of a few months, was brought before the Synod. A band of lawyers attended, armed with all the instruments of legal strife ; and, after the same scenes had been transacted here, which had previously been rehearsed in the presbytery, the results were found to be equally satisfactory. If the Synod threw the presentation over the table, on account of the presentee not having received a call from the people, then the patron, or his agent, appealed to a higher tribunal. If, on the other hand, the Synod declared that a call from the people was not necessary, and that a legal presentation from the patron was, of itself, a sufficiently good document for authorizing the settlement of a minister, then the defeated parishioners “ took instruments in the clerk’s hands, and craved extracts.” Either of these alternatives brought the parties into the Supreme Court : then came “ the tug of war” before the Assembly, when, after an ample display of gladiatorship betwixt the appellants and respondents, the case of the people was found to be hopeless. Principal Robertson, or some other leader, propounded the law of the church to be, that “ a presentation, adhered to by the presentee, must in all cases be made effectual,” independent of the wishes of the people ; that a call, though it was a becoming enough appendage (when it could be procured), was not necessary to constitute the pastoral relation, and that the Assembly had no alternative left them but to order the settlement of the patron’s candidate to take place, let the consequences to the reclaiming parish, or the church of Christ, be what they may. Such being declared to be *the law*, and a motion having been carried to this effect, an edict was issued to the presbytery to take immediate steps for getting the presentee ordained, as minister of the vacant congregation. But in those days it was much easier issuing such decrees, than getting them executed. The people, though defeated in the Assembly, still continued to resist ; and, before the work of ordination could be completed, the presence of the sheriff,

and of a party of soldiers, was frequently not less necessary than the presence of the presbytery. When the indignant parishioners found that protests and arguments were of no avail, they had recourse to intimidation. Sometimes, when the ministers were on their way to ordain the intruder, they were way-laid by the multitude, and carried off till the time appointed for the ordination was past. Sometimes they were assailed by showers of stones, and other missiles, and were obliged to make a precipitate retreat, as if fleeing before an enraged enemy; and, before they could return to execute the work which the Assembly had appointed them to perform, the civil authorities were obliged to guarantee their safety, by marching along with them at the head of a troop of dragoons, or a company of foot soldiers.

Nothing could be more deplorable, than the state of the Scottish parishes at this period. The policy of Dr Robertson, and of the party that acted along with him, was to subdue all opposition to the law of patronage, by showing that no resistance, however long continued, or however fiercely conducted, could be of any avail. It were easy to multiply instances of the oppressive and disgraceful proceedings to which an inflexible adherence to this line of policy gave rise, in the settlement of ministers. But the following specimen of a mock-induction, which took place within the bounds of the Stirling presbytery, presents such an extraordinary scene, that, if it had not been well authenticated, we could scarcely have given it credit. It shows us, to what miserable shifts the ministers, as well as the people, were occasionally reduced, in yielding compliance with the tyrannical mandates of the ecclesiastical courts. I shall here quote the account given of this transaction, by Struthers in his *History of Scotland*.*

“ A presentation by Sir J. Stuart of Allanbank, for Mr David Thomson, minister of Gargunnoch, to be minister of St Ninian's, was sustained by the General Assembly in 1767, and the presbytery of Stirling ordered to proceed with

* Struther's *History of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 609, &c.

his settlement, according to the rules of the church. Mr Thomson was an old man, very infirm, and the whole parish of St Ninians, not excepting heritors and elders, were violently opposed to him ; some episcopalians and a few non-residing heritors, under the influence of the patron, being all that could be prevailed upon to concur in his call. The presbytery felt it to be a hard case, and they found means to put it off for seven long years, in the course of which various schemes were proposed for reconciling the parish, all of which, through the imbecility, the duplicity, and the obstinacy of the patron and his presentee, came to nothing ; and, in the year 1773, the presbytery were enjoined by the General Assembly, on a certain day, to induct Mr Thomson into the living of St Ninians without fail, and every member of presbytery to attend, or to answer for his absence, at the bar of the next General Assembly. The presbytery of Stirling were now in a very great dilemma. There was really no call by the parish for Mr Thomson, and in the negotiations that had been carried on during so many years, for reconciling the parish to his ministry, he had, by his selfish conduct, very much disgusted all the brethren of the presbytery, and not one of them was willing to preach and preside on the occasion. In this situation of the presbytery, Mr Robert Findlay of Dollar, their moderator, undertook to introduce him, at the presbytery table, which seems to have been heartily agreed to, every one being desirous of having the burden shifted from his own shoulders. Accordingly, when the presbytery arrived at St Ninians, where an immense crowd waited to receive them, they attempted to take possession of the manse, but found it shut against them, and they were, along with the multitude, almost carried per force into the church. Mr Findlay, probably happy to find the multitude in a condition to listen, ascended the pulpit and gave out a psalm, which was sung with all due decorum, after which he prayed, but took no notice whatever of the purpose for which they were assembled. He, then, instead of preaching, as was expected, called upon Mr Thomson by

name, who stood up in his place, and to whom he made the following singular address:—

“ ‘ Sir, we are met here this day by a former appointment of presbytery, in obedience to the same sentence of the General Assembly, to admit you minister of St Ninians, a sentence pronounced by the highest horn of ecclesiastical authority or power, that Assembly having assumed to themselves higher power than the parliament, by some profanely styled omnipotent, that wise, that august body never exacting any laws without consent of the people. There has been a formidable opposition made against you by six hundred heads of families, sixty heritors, and all the elders of the parish, I believe, except one. This opposition has continued for seven years by your own obstinacy, and if you should this day be admitted you can have no pastoral relation to the souls of this parish, you will never be regarded as the shepherd to go before the sheep, they know you not, and they will never follow you ; and, let me assure you, dear Sir, if you still persist in your obstinacy, you will do more harm in this parish than you could have done good in Gargunnoch, though you had been to live there for a hundred years ; and you will draw misery and contempt upon yourself—you will be despised—you will be hated—you will be insulted and maltreated. One of the most eloquent and learned ministers of this church told me lately that he would go twenty miles to see you deposed, and I do assure you, Sir, that I and twenty thousand more friends to our church would do the same. I must observe to you, that in the course of this opposition, your conduct and behaviour has been altogether unworthy and unbecoming a minister of the gospel. In that memorable letter of yours to the presbytery of Stirling, intimating your acceptance of the call, notwithstanding the numerous body of the people opposing, I wish it was in my power to forget it, you have those impious and blasphemous expressions, “ That you accepted of it in the fear of God ;” and at a meeting of the presbytery when you was exhorted and earnestly entreated to give up the presentation,

you said that you had engaged your honour to that honourable and worthy gentleman the patron, and that you would not give it up for ten thousand pounds. What can one of your sensibility of temper and feeling propose in this mad attempt in thus rushing to foreseen misery? You was always esteemed an orthodox and evangelical preacher, and no man can lay any thing to your charge as to that. You maintained a good character and reputation till your unhappy and obstinate adherence to this presentation. Now bending under the weight of years and infirmities of old age, what happiness can you propose to yourself, in this mad, this desperate attempt of yours, without the concurrence of the people, and without the least prospect of usefulness in this parish. Your admission into it, therefore, can only be regarded as a sinecure, and you yourself as stipend-lifter of St Ninians; for you can have no farther relation to this parish— * * * Now, Sir, I conjure you by the mercies of God, give up this presentation; I conjure you for the sake of the great number of souls of St Ninians, who are like sheep going astray without a shepherd to lead them, and who will never hear you, will never submit to you, give it up; and I conjure you by that peace of mind which you would wish in a dying hour, and that awful and impartial account which in a little you must give to God of your own soul, and of the souls of this parish, at the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ, give it up.*

“ This, all the circumstances of the case considered, is unquestionably one of the most extraordinary speeches that has ever been uttered, though it certainly had truth for its basis, and against some of its appeals one would suppose that no conscience illuminated by a single ray of the Bible would have been proof; and Mr Findlay most probably was secretly presuming, that, having performed the painful duty of reproof and admonition so very freely, he would be saved the still more painful one, of admitting the object thereof under the name of pastor to be ‘ stipend-lifter’ of St Ninians. If so, with what astonishment must he have listened to the la-

* Scots Magazine, vol. xxxv. Pp. 614, 615, quoted by Struthers.

conic reply of the orthodox and evangelical Mr Thomson, ‘ I forgive you, Sir, for what you have now said ; may God forgive you ; proceed to obey the orders of your superiors.’ Mr Findlay, feeling, no doubt, that to put the questions in the formula to such a candidate would be only adding to the farce, and though he was requested to do so by some of the members, proceeded to say, ‘ I, as moderator of the presbytery of Stirling, admit you, Mr David Thomson, to be minister of the parish of St Ninians, in the true sense and spirit of the late sentence of the General Assembly, and you are hereby admitted accordingly.’ He then prayed, but in doing so neither noticed patron, presentee, nor presbytery, and, after singing a few lines of a psalm, dismissed the congregation.”

Such is a specimen of the treatment, to which the people of Scotland were subjected, in consequence of the cruel policy pursued by the General Assembly, at this period, in rigorously carrying into effect the law of patronage, regardless of the wishes and remonstrances of those whose spiritual interests ought to have been consulted. A short time previous to the above transaction, scenes not less disgraceful had taken place, at the settlement of unpopular ministers at Kirk of Shotts and Eaglesham. On the day appointed for ordination at the former of these places, no sooner did the presentee (Mr Wells) make his appearance, than the people flew upon him, before the rest of the ministers assembled, and, carrying him off, compelled him to sign a paper, promising that he would never trouble them again. When the presbytery met, they could get no access to either the church or the churchyard ; and finding it impossible to constitute, on account of the tumult that prevailed, they were obliged to separate without getting their object accomplished. A statement of the matter being laid before the Assembly, who were sitting at the time, they renewed their appointment on the presbytery to proceed with the ordination, on the following Thursday ; and application being made to the Lord Advocate, he “ was pleased to undertake that they should have the aid of the civil power to protect them in the execution of this appointment.”

When the day arrived, the Sheriff and a Justice of the peace attended, with a troop of dragoons and a company of infantry, to protect the presbytery, while engaged in the solemn work of ordination. But the ministers were never permitted to reach the spot : they were way-laid by the parishioners and carried off ; and the Sheriff and his military attendants, after having cooled themselves and exhausted their patience by waiting on the moor, marched home without ever having got a sight either of the people or of the presbytery. The ordination took place, some months afterward, in the session-house of Hamilton.

In the case of Eaglesham, after the usual preliminary conflicts had taken place betwixt the parties, in due form, before the church courts, the presbytery, attended by a numerous retinue of country gentlemen, and of clergymen from other presbyteries, went forth in solemn procession from Glasgow, with Principal Leechman at their head, to ordain the obnoxious presentee, Mr Clerk. When they drew near to the scene of action, they found the people waiting at the entry to the village, prepared with offensive weapons to give them a hostile reception ; and when the company, leaving their carriages, attempted to force their way into the church, a furious charge was made upon them by the indignant multitude, with clubs and stones, so that ministers and laymen were obliged to make a precipitate retreat to their vehicles, and to drive off with all possible speed ; nor were they safe from the fury of their pursuers, till they had got beyond the confines of the parish. After some delay had taken place, the General Assembly ordered the presbytery to proceed with the ordination ; and having obtained the assistance of a company of soldiers, they were enabled, the next time they returned, to accomplish their object.*

Such was the *working* of the law of patronage in this country, and such were the tender mercies of the dominant party in the Assembly toward the people. Amid scenes similar to those now described did the cause of the Secession acquire daily

* Struther's History of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 608.

strength ; and fully to appreciate the value of the Secession to the country, it is proper to bear in mind, that such scenes were by no means of rare occurrence in the Scottish Church. That the country does not still continue to be distracted by them, has been owing in a great measure to the existence of the Secession. It opened up a quiet asylum for the people to enter, where the ordinances of religion were dispensed to them by ministers of their own choice, and where they could enjoy the solemnity of an ordination without being *sabred* into submission, or overawed by the terrors of the bayonet.

While the Secession Church had to contend with opposition from without, its harmony was occasionally disturbed by feuds within. These latter, however, were, for the most part, but of short continuance, and the effects of them passed speedily away. An instance of this kind occurred at the present period of my narrative. A controversy, occasioned by a diversity in the mode of dispensing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, arose in the west of Scotland ; and though the point in dispute was really a matter of indifference, as not involving, either one way or another, any essential article of the christian faith, yet those with whom the controversy originated, attached so much importance to it, that nothing less would satisfy them than bringing their brethren to a complete uniformity of sentiment with themselves ; and by the obstinacy, with which they persevered in urging the adopting of their views, they kept many of the congregations in a state of agitation for several years.

Some of the ministers, in administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, did not take the bread and the cup into their hand, previous to the consecration prayer, but lifted them only when they were about to put them into the hands of the communicants. Others, constituting by far the largest portion of the Synod, before engaging in prayer, lifted a portion of the bread and the cup ; and then, after prayer, and an address to the communicants, took them into their hand a second time, and distributed them in the usual manner. Mr David Smyton, minister at Kilmaurs, was one of those

who adopted this latter mode ; and he considered the “ lifting” of the sacred elements *before* the consecration prayer as constituting an essential part of the ordinance. He was desirous that a uniformity should be observed in this matter, and that those brethren, whose practice differed from his own, should be authoritatively enjoined to adopt the same method which he pursued. A petition from Mr Smyton and his session, brought the business before the Glasgow presbytery, and the presbytery referred the matter for advice to the Synod. The advice given by the Synod, at their spring meeting in 1782, was, that this was a question with regard to which those, who entertained different views, ought to exercise mutual forbearance. On the 21st of May, the same year, the session of Kilmaurs presented a petition to the presbytery, urging them to give an immediate decision in their cause ; and when the presbytery had expressed their judgment, concerning the advice given by the Synod, as most proper to be adopted in present circumstances, and were about to converse with the petitioners, conformably to said advice, Mr Smyton protested, in his own name, and in the name of those who should adhere to him, against this procedure of the presbytery ; declaring, that it “ gave a wound to the testimony among their hands ;” that it “ settled a boundless toleration contrary to the above testimony ;” that it “ laid aside the command, injunction, and example of our Lord, in the way of appointing and administering the solemn ordinance of the Supper ;” and that it “ brought in the Confession of Faith as opposite to the plain scriptural rule above mentioned ;” and he appealed to the next meeting of Synod. At meetings of presbytery, held on the 31st of July and on the 26th of August, petitions and remonstrances on the same subject were presented from a number of people belonging to the congregations of Kilmaurs, Kilwinning, Paisley, Greenock, and Beith, all of which were transmitted, along with Mr Smyton’s protest, to the Synod.

In the month of September the Synod met, and when they were about to enter upon the consideration of this cause, Mr

Gib laid the following protest upon the table :—“ Whereas several ministers of this Synod, of whom I am one, when dispensing the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in our congregations, do not practise the taking or the lifting up of a part of the bread and wine, with a laying or setting of the same down again, before consecration, or before setting them apart by prayer from a common to a holy use, only taking up these elements, when so consecrated, for breaking and distributing the same ; in which method of procedure we apprehend ourselves to be warranted, yea, to which we reckon ourselves to be obligated, by Scripture and reason, and our subordinate standards. And whereas we have never attempted, as we never had any freedom, to disturb the peace of the church, by stating and prosecuting any quarrel with our brethren of a different practice, leaving them to their own freedom, as to the said first taking or lifting up, while not grafting any doctrines upon that practice, unto a making any addition to the mystical significations which our Lord hath put upon the things and actions of the Sacramental Supper : But whereas a brother of Glasgow presbytery has been labouring very industriously and effectually in begetting a ferment among the people, and raising many of them up into a seditious clamour against our said method of procedure in dispensing that sacrament, as if the same were sinful and scandalous : And whereas the said brother and his partisans, who are attempting to get that affair pushed into a general discussion by this Synod, cannot pretend that they are seeking relief from any imposition upon themselves, or a redress of any evil supposed to take place under the Synod’s authority ; but it is most unquestionable, that their whole attempt, in this matter, is only meant as a material and underhand or secret attack upon us, as to our said method of procedure :

“ I do, therefore, hereby protest for myself, and for all others upon whom this covert attack is made, that the said brother and his partisans cannot fairly and honestly bring this affair before the Synod, except in the way of a formal and particular complaint upon us, exhibiting special articles

against us ; with a specification of the passages of the Holy Scriptures, and of our subordinate standards, and of our ordination vows, which we are supposed to contravene, or trample upon by our said method of procedure : And that this Synod cannot regularly give them a hearing upon this affair in any other manner ; and that any proposal by them for a hearing upon it in any other manner, or in the manner now attempted, ought to be simpliciter rejected, in common justice to us ; that we may not be struck at underhand, in a deceitful and injurious manner, but in the way of a fair and open trial, upon which we are ready to answer for our conduct. And upon all this I take instruments. ADAM GIB."

Upon this protest the Synod pronounced no judgment, but entered upon the consideration of the general question. After considerable discussion, they dismissed Mr Smyton's protest and appeal ; and in reference to the remonstrances and petitions from the different congregations, above mentioned, they renewed their advice formerly given to the Glasgow presbytery, viz. That the brethren exercise forbearance with one another in this matter ; that they inform the people, that the Synod reckon it very unjustifiable for them to endeavour to impose their judgment upon others in this affair ; and that they deal with them to guard against reflections upon those who observe a practice different from what they think best ; and that if they find it difficult to deal with the people, they call in the assistance of members of other presbyteries, as they find it necessary. It was further recommended to the members of presbytery to hold meetings among themselves for prayer and conference on the subject. A recommendation was also given to the people to converse with their own or other ministers, with a view to get their difficulties removed ; and to peruse the Holy Scriptures, the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms and Directory for public worship, with fervent supplication to God for light in the matter..

When this decision was intimated to the parties, Mr Smyton offered to protest : but a promise being given him,

that he would afterwards have an opportunity afforded him of marking what he might think necessary for his exoneration, he was induced, in the mean time, to forbear. At a subsequent sederunt, he presented the following paper, and craved that it might be recorded in the minutes:—"I, Mr David Smyton, minister of the gospel at Kilmaurs, crave to express my dissatisfaction with the judgment of Synod, with reference to our protestation and appeal: At the same time, I crave leave that this expression of my dissatisfaction be recorded in the minutes of Synod, for my exoneration, and that the door be left open to me at next meeting of Synod to act therein as the Lord shall direct."

At next meeting, held in May 1783, Mr Smyton again made his appearance, and insisted that, according to the liberty formerly granted, he might be allowed to state his sentiments. As he was now labouring under the infirmities of age, and had been long in the ministry, and was generally respected, the Synod were averse to push matters to an extremity with him. They appointed a committee to converse with him on the subject, and to report at next sederunt. On the following forenoon, the committee reported, "that they had met and conversed with Mr Smyton, but found him resolute." Mr Smyton then addressed the Synod, and urged the reversal of their deed of September 4th, last year, for mutual forbearance concerning the difference of practice, in the administration of the Lord's Supper. A considerable time was spent in endeavouring to show him, that he had mistaken the deed; and a motion was made, that a committee be appointed to explain it, with a view to the removal of Mr Smyton's scruples. But Mr Smyton declared, that he would not attend a committee, that he was now come to a stand in the matter, and was determined that something satisfactory should be done at this meeting. After he had been dealt with for some time, he gave in a paper, renouncing the authority of the Synod, and declaring that he could no longer have connexion with them, on account of their refusing to reverse the obnoxious deed. When he was about to with-

draw, the Synod summoned him, *apud acta*, to attend at their bar next day ; and, in the meantime, they appointed a committee to prepare an overture about what was proper to be done in the circumstances of the case.

When the Synod met next forenoon, Mr Smyton was called, but did not appear ; and the committee, appointed to prepare an overture on the subject, reported, that however much lenity and tenderness were due to Mr Smyton, on account of the infirmities of old age, yet his conduct in the present instance had been so obstinate and offensive, as to render it proper that censure should be inflicted on him, unless he should appear at the bar of the Synod and retract the paper which he had given in on the preceding evening. As he did not make his appearance, the Synod suspended him from the exercise of his ministry.

This question, however, was not set at rest by Mr Smyton ceasing to be a member of Synod. Trivial though it may appear, it still continued to agitate some of the congregations. In September, 1784, a petition from some members, belonging to the congregation in Glasgow, was brought before the Synod by protest, in which they craved, that the Synod would review their act of forbearance, respecting the mode of administering the Lord's Supper. This petition and protest the Synod dismissed ; but they appointed a committee to prepare an explanation and vindication of their act, with a view to remove misconceptions concerning it from the minds of the people. The committee were inclined to let the matter slumber, and they delayed for some time giving any report. But Mr Graham of Newcastle having represented, that the state of his congregation was such as to render an explanation necessary, the Synod renewed their injunction to the committee to prepare without delay an explanatory statement. The following resolutions were presented by the committee, and being approved of, as expressive of the sentiments of the Synod with regard to the question in dispute, they were ordered to be inserted in the minutes.

“ First, There were various circumstances in our Lord's

institution and administration of the Sacramental Supper, some of which always, and others of them for many hundreds of years by-past, have been generally considered as occasional circumstances, not belonging to the standing order, in the dispensing of that ordinance : as it was then dispensed at night, and in an upper room, and after supper, and to all at one table, and to them in a leaning posture, and only to male communicants, though our Lord had then some very distinguished female disciples ; and as Jesus blessed or gave thanks when he took the bread, he likewise again blessed or gave thanks when he took the cup.

“ Second, The present difference of practice in the taking of the sacramental elements, turns wholly on this point,—that many of the ministers consider the aforesaid first taking as belonging to the standing order of the Sacramental Supper, in the proper, complete, decent, and solemn manner of its administration, conformable to our Lord’s example ; while several others of them consider that first taking, as an occasional circumstance of the first administration, not belonging to the said standing order, or not recorded for imitation more than the other occasional circumstances which are above mentioned, nor warranted as such in our standards.

“ Third, This difference of practice nowise imports or means any difference about the matter or substance of that holy ordinance ; while no material or substantial part thereof is, or can be, justly considered as lying in the one manner or practice, or the other : as it is agreed on both sides, that the mystical or spiritual and symbolical significations of things and actions in that sacrament, are not to be extended further than our Lord extended the same by the words of institution ; and that they are not extended further on the one hand, nor abridged on the other, by the said difference of practice.

“ Fourth, This difference of practice, as presently circumstantiated, is not known to have ever undergone any public discussion and decision in any christian church, so as to give a place to the one manner or practice preferably to the other, among the terms of church order and communion.

The said difference is therefore most unquestionably a matter of doubtful disputation, about which, according to the plain rule of Scripture, there ought to be a forbearing of one another in love—every man to be fully persuaded in his own mind, without presuming to judge and condemn others in that difference.

“ The Synod's resolution of mutual forbearance in this matter, has been most grievously and groundlessly calumniated, as if it meant a laying aside the command, injunction, and example of our Lord, in the way of appointing and administering the solemn ordinance of the Supper, &c.; whereas it is obvious, that the said resolution means nothing more than forbearing of one another in love, about a circumstance of doubtful disputation, no way affecting the matter or substance of that solemn ordinance; that it means no sort of toleration for any thing judged or supposed by them, or known to have been ever judged or supposed in any christian church, to be an evil thing; and that it only cautions against strife or contention about the above-mentioned difference of practice, unto a marring of peace, communion, and mutual edification among ministers and people; so that when any find themselves obliged, in necessary self-defence, to give an account for the one practice, they might do so without impugning or inveighing against the other. Wherefore, it is evident, that a persisting in the heavy reproaches which have been cast upon the Synod about this affair, can only proceed from ignorance or misapprehension, and the working of a schismatical spirit, unto an unchristian judging or condemning of others.”

The adopting of these explanatory resolutions had a favourable effect; for immediately after this, the controversy was consigned to oblivion.

At this period, meetings were held by ministers and people in different districts both of Scotland and Ireland, the object of which was to promote a union betwixt the two bodies of the Secession; and an overture to this effect was presented to the Synod, at their meeting in May, 1784, from the pres-

bytery of Moyrah and Lisburn in Ireland ; and this overture was accompanied by a petition from the presbytery of Newtonlimavady, cordially concurring in the same object. In these documents, the Irish brethren recommended to the Synod to adopt as a “ preliminary ground for a treaty of peace and union,” “ That both parties declare their adherence to the whole of the Secession Testimony attained to, while they were united ; that is, all that was attained to, antecedent to the meeting of Synod in April, 1747.” They expressed their hope, that the brethren of the other side would not object to this ground as the basis of union ; and they added,—“ If this point were once settled, and a treaty set on foot on this ground, that, through the Lord’s blessing on friendly conference, with fervent prayer, and a mutual dropping of all criminations, which respect rather the honour of the parties than the merits of the cause, and the testimony which they espouse,—such as the propriety of the censures on the one side, and the validity of the Synod’s constitution on the other,—both parties, so long and unhappily divided, might come to see eye to eye, and with one mind and one mouth glorify God : And the Secession Church, united in public testimony and mutual love, should again, as in former times, look forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” The petition from the presbytery of Newtonlimavady included in it a request, that the Synod would sanction the presbyteries of Ireland erecting themselves into a court, as a sister church.

The Synod expressed their disapprobation of the overture introduced by the presbytery of Moyrah. They declared it to be “ incompetent and irregular for ministers or private christians to take under review, in order to re-judge and determine, without the authority of this Synod, the matters of public difference between this Synod and the separating brethren, which nearly relate to the common cause, and which have already been decided by the supreme judicatory.” They further declared, “ that terms of coalescence cannot

consistently be listened unto at any time, by this Synod, or any under their inspection, with any who still continue to homologate or adhere unto any act or acts pretending to annul the constitution, and annihilate the authority of the Synod." To these declarations they subjoined, that while the door was always open to receive persons of every denomination into their communion, upon the terms and in the manner which they had openly avowed to the world, and from which they had never seen any cause to recede; "so they would in particular be most ready to receive into connexion with them their separating brethren, or those of their communion, upon due evidence of their desisting from their opposition, and returning to their duty; and when any applications or proposals should be made with such a view and tendency, they would be considered with that serious attention and deliberation, which the nature and importance of such a subject requires, and with all the alacrity and sincere satisfaction, which such a long-wished for and desirable event might justly excite."

With regard to the proposal to erect the Irish presbyteries into a Synod, which should be regarded as a sister church, it was rejected on the ground that such a measure was inconsistent with the unity of the church of Christ, and would be prejudicial to the general interests of the Secession. These decisions were not satisfactory to the Irish brethren. They sent up a representation at next meeting, complaining of what the Synod had done, and craving that they would review their deed. This second application shared the same fate with the first. The Synod not only refused to grant the prayer of the petitioners, but they expressed disapprobation of their conduct, in not resting satisfied with the decisions which had formerly been given. They agreed, however, to express their sympathy with the brethren in Ireland, "in their present hazardous circumstances," and they appointed a committee to correspond with them relative to the matters, concerning which application had been made to the Synod.

On a recommendation given by the committee for examining the students, the Philosophical Class, which for several years had been taught by Mr Smart at Kirkaldy, was at this time removed to Edinburgh, under the superintendence of the same person, that the students who were attending his prelections might have an opportunity of devoting their attention to other departments of literature. None were to be admitted to the study of philosophy, under Mr Smart, who did not produce a certificate of their having previously studied the Greek language ; and though it was not rendered imperative on any of the students to attend this class, provided they studied philosophy at some of the universities, yet a recommendation was given to all to attend it, who might have in view the study of divinity, under the inspection of the Synod.

Intelligence reached the Synod concerning the state of affairs in America, which was by no means gratifying to them. Almost all the brethren belonging to the presbytery of Pennsylvania* had, in the month of June, 1782, formed a union with the Reformed Presbytery in that country (connected with the anti-government party, as they were termed, in Scotland), and with two ministers belonging to the Burgher Secession Synod. These brethren, thus united, had constituted themselves into a Synod, under the designation of *The Associate Reformed Synod*. Messrs Marshall and Clarkson were the only ministers, belonging to the presbytery, who refused to join the coalition, and who continued firm to their old connexion. These two brethren, along with three elders who adhered to them, claimed the authority of the Associate Presbytery in Pennsylvania. Letters were sent

* The names of these brethren who formed the union with the Reformed Presbytery, were—Messrs James Proudfoot, Matthew Henderson, John Mason, Robert Annan, John Smith, and William Logan ; together with Mr John Roger, who, some time previous to this, had been deposed by the presbytery, on the ground of error. A few years after this, Mr Henderson made application to be restored to the presbytery of Pennsylvania ; and having made acknowledgment of his guilt “ in departing from his former profession,” the brethren again received him into their communion.

home by them to the Synod, stating their destitute circumstances, and earnestly requesting that additional ministers might be sent out, as they were totally unable, on account of the smallness of their number, to answer the demands that were made upon them for preaching. The Synod ordered Mr Thomas Beveridge to be ordained by the Edinburgh presbytery, and to proceed without delay to that scene of labour. * They also appointed a committee to prepare an address to the ministers and people in Pennsylvania, who continued in subordination to the Synod, and to consider what measures it might be proper to adopt, with regard to those who had renounced their connexion.

In August, 1785, the Synod called for the report of the committee appointed to prepare an address to the ministers and people belonging to their communion in North America. Mr Gib presented the draught of an act and an address, which, after receiving some amendments, was adopted, and transmitted to the presbytery in Pennsylvania. The draught of a more voluminous address was also read, intended for general circulation amongst the Seceders in America ; but the Synod, finding that their time did not permit them to revise and consider it with that care which its importance demanded, and, also, that the confirmed state of the breach which had taken place amongst the American brethren, rendered some parts of it unsuitable, laid it aside, and rested satisfied with the expression of their sentiments contained in the act now mentioned.

In this document they expressed their disapprobation of the conduct of those brethren who had renounced connexion with the Synod, and who had coalesced with ministers of other denominations, "on terms so loose and general, as to throw open the door to the grossest latitudinarianism." They disclaimed all connexion with, and acknowledgment of, "the body so constituted ;" and they declared the brethren

* Mr Beveridge, after receiving ordination, left Scotland in the end of 1783, and was admitted to the charge of a congregation at Cambridge, in America, on the 10th of September, 1789.

who had joined it, "to be in a state of apostacy from their reformation testimony and their witnessing profession." On the other hand, they expressed their approbation of the conduct of those ministers and elders who had continued firm in their allegiance to the Synod. They considered it a matter of great thankfulness to the Lord, that these brethren had "been enabled to proceed with honesty, faithfulness; and zeal, according to their ordination vows and solemn covenant engagements, in maintaining the Lord's cause among their hands." They further declared, that, as these brethren had entered a protest against the decision of the majority agreeing to the union, and had appealed to the Synod, which protest and appeal had been refused a place in the minutes; and as they had entered another protest against this refusal, and claimed to have the powers of the Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania rightfully vested in them, as being the only members adhering to its original constitution and principles; they therefore recognised and justified the constitution of the presbytery, as claimed by these protesting ministers and elders; and they acknowledged them to be the only lawful and rightly constituted presbytery of Pennsylvania, in connexion with, and subordinate to, the Synod in Scotland.

With the view of strengthening the hands of the brethren in Pennsylvania, the Synod resolved that they would immediately undertake new missions to that country; but they had considerable difficulty in getting their benevolent resolution carried into effect. There was a decided aversion, on the part of the young men under their charge, to undertake transatlantic missions. By far the greater number of those who were appointed to this honourable work, refused to go. At this meeting they appointed Mr James Hog to be ordained by the presbytery of Glasgow, and to depart for America by the earliest opportunity; and a recommendation was given to the several presbyteries to make contributions, either publicly or privately, to defray the expense of the mission. Mr Hog proved refractory. The presbytery afterward reported, that though they had dealt with him, at several

meetings, to fulfil the appointment of Synod, they had been unsuccessful. They further stated, that, in his conversations with them, he had given offence, by uttering sentiments subversive of the subordination of ecclesiastical judicatories; particularly, that he did not consider that the presbytery of Pennsylvania was bound to obey the decisions of the Synod, as none of its members had it in their power to be present at the meetings of Synod. It was considered inexpedient to insist upon his fulfilling the appointment, and a committee of Synod was appointed to obtain satisfaction from him, for the offensive language which he had uttered. This satisfaction the committee obtained, and Mr Hog was soon afterward ordained at Kelso.

In the meantime, another communication was received (May, 1786) from the brethren in Pennsylvania, stating what strong necessity there was for a reinforcement of ministers being sent to them from the mother country, as numerous and urgent applications were made to them for sermon, which, in their present reduced state, they were unable to grant. Moved by this representation, the Synod again took the matter into serious consideration; and, after prayer to God for the divine direction and blessing, they appointed Mr William Puller to go on a mission to America; and the presbytery of Perth, under whose inspection he then resided, was enjoined either to send him forth immediately, or to take him on trials for ordination, according as time and circumstances might permit. At the next meeting, the presbytery reported, that they had been unable to prevail upon Mr Puller to yield compliance with this appointment; at the same time they stated, by way of apology for him, that he had been partly hindered by distress. The Synod refused to withdraw their appointment, and insisted that Mr Puller should comply. They also appointed Mr John Smith, another of their preachers, to accompany him. The result, with regard to both of these individuals, was unsuccessful. Neither of them crossed the Atlantic.

At the same meeting at which the above communication

was received from Pennsylvania, a petition was presented from a number of the inhabitants of Pictou, in Nova Scotia, craving that Mr James Drummond Macgregor might be sent to labour amongst them. Mr Macgregor had been born upon the borders of the Highlands, and was capable of preaching in Gaelic as well as in English. This circumstance was mentioned by the petitioners as a reason why the services of Mr Macgregor would be peculiarly valuable in Pictou, seeing that many of the inhabitants of that town and neighbourhood were of Highland origin, and were desirous to obtain a minister who could address them in their native language. The Synod readily acceded to the request of these individuals. Mr Macgregor also showed a willingness to comply. He was ordained in the course of a few weeks after the meeting of Synod, by the presbytery of Glasgow, and soon after embarked for Nova Scotia.

On the 4th of August 1786, Mr William Moncrieff, Professor of Divinity died ; and, at their meeting in September, the Synod chose Mr Archibald Bruce, minister of the gospel at Whitburn, to be his successor. Mr Moncrieff had occupied the Theological Chair, for four and twenty years, during which period he had discharged the duties of his office with great fidelity and acceptance. His labours also were quite disinterested. Following in the footsteps of his venerable father, he refused to receive any emolument as Professor. In consideration of his valuable and gratuitous services, the Synod agreed, after his death, to give £20 a-year out of their fund, for the benefit of his younger children, so long as they should need it. They further agreed, that Mr Bruce, their newly elected Professor, should receive an annual salary of £50, on account of the trouble and expense connected with his charge.

At this period, a proposal was made, that the Synod should consider the propriety of constituting itself into a General Synod or Assembly, consisting of several subordinate synods, whose meetings should be held in central situations, so that members residing at a distance might have it in

their power more conveniently to attend. The wide extent of territory over which the congregations in connexion with the Synod, were scattered, rendered it expedient that some alteration should be made, with a view to the accommodation of members, and also to facilitate the conducting of business. During the forty years that had now nearly elapsed, since the breach took place, this portion of the Secession had been successful in planting congregations, not merely in the central districts, but in the northern counties of Scotland, as well as in the south and west. It had also a considerable number of congregations in Ireland; and the inconvenience of a journey to Edinburgh, to attend the meetings of Synod, must have been felt to be so great, by the representatives of the Irish congregations, that they could scarcely, if ever, be present. To remedy this evil, a petition was transmitted from the presbytery of Moyrah and Lisburn, craving that the presbyteries in Ireland might be erected into a synod, not subordinate to the Synod in Scotland, but co-ordinate with it; or, should this be refused, that a General Synod should be formed, having several synods under its jurisdiction in Scotland, and one in Ireland. This proposal was laid before the Synod at its meeting in May 1786, and a committee was appointed to take the subject into consideration, and to report at next meeting. A recommendation was also given to the several presbyteries, to consider the proposal, that they might be prepared to give an opinion concerning it.

At next meeting, nothing further was done in the matter; but at the spring meeting of the following year, the committee presented the scheme of a division into particular synods, with accompanying regulations. These were transmitted to the presbyteries, that they might consider them, and report their opinion to the committee. Another year passed before the Synod resumed the consideration of the subject. In the month of May 1788, the reports of the several presbyteries were received; and, though some of them objected to particular parts of the proposed arrangement,

there was a decided majority in favour of the general design of the overture. A long discussion ensued, and several of the brethren were employed in prayer for the divine direction on the subject; after which the vote was taken upon the following question, *Agree to adopt the general design of the overture, in erecting different synods in subordination to one General Synod? Or, Lay it aside?* when it carried by a considerable majority, *To adopt.*

The different presbyteries in connexion with the association, were constituted into four synods, viz. three in Scotland, and one in Ireland, which were to be in subordination to one General Synod; and the following was the arrangement which the Synod sanctioned:—The presbytery of Edinburgh, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Edinburgh, Howgate, Elsrighill, Eastbarns, Craigmaling, Mid-Calder, Borrowstounness, Whitburn, Dalkeith, Ayton, Lauder, Haddington, and London, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions; the presbytery of Kelso, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Dunse, Earlston, Midholm, Norham, Newcastle, Jedburgh, Hawick, Morebattle, Kelso, and Peebles, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions; and the presbytery of Dumfries, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Orr, Lockerby, Dumfries, Stranraer, Sanquhar, Glencairn, Wigton, and Whitehaven, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions, were erected into a synod, under the designation of the Associate Synod of Edinburgh. They were appointed to hold their first meeting at Edinburgh, on the first Tuesday of September, and Mr Gib was appointed to preach on the occasion, and to constitute the Synod.

The presbytery of Perth, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Kinkell, Methven, Logie-Almond, Errol, Crieff, Abernethy, Perth, Cupar-Angus, Pathstruyhill, and Lethendy, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions; the presbytery of Kirkaldy, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Cairneyhill, Leslie, Kirkaldy, Ceres, Auchtermuchty, and Orwell, with a ruling elder from each of the

sessions ; and the presbytery of Forfar, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Rattray, Brechin, Johnshaven, Dunbarrow, Kirriemuir, Dundee, Forfar, and Alyth, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions, including also the vacant congregations of Montrose, Muirton, Arbroath, and Ennoch, were erected into a synod, under the designation of the Associate Synod of Perth. Their first meeting was to be held at Perth, on the first Tuesday of September, and Mr Muckersie was appointed to preach and constitute the Synod. *

The presbytery of Glasgow, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Glasgow, Paisley, Greenock, Strathaven, Mearns, Hamilton, Rothsay, and Pictou in Nova Scotia, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions ; the presbytery of Stirling, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Denny, Stirling, Dunblane, Buchlyvie, Muckhart, Falkirk, Balfron, and Alloa, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions ; and the presbytery of Kilmarnock, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Kilwinning, Auchinleck, Beith, Newmilns, Kilmarnock, Colmonell, and Ayr, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions, were erected into a synod, under the designation of the Associate Synod of Glasgow. They were appointed to hold their first meeting at Glasgow, on the same day as the others. Mr Walker was to preach, and constitute the Synod.

In Ireland, the presbytery of Belfast, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Gilnakirk, Hillhall, Bally-Copeland, Belfast, and Newtonards, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions ; the presbytery of Market-hill, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Market-hill, Tyrone's Ditches, Newry, and Moyrah, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions ; the presbytery of Derry, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Newton-

* The presbyteries of Aberdeen and Elgin were to be under the immediate inspection of the General Synod, until another presbytery should be formed in the north, when they were to be erected into another provincial synod.

limavady, Raphoe, Ahadowie, and Londonderry, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions; and the presbytery of Temple-patrick and Ahoghill, consisting of the ministers of the congregations of Temple-patrick, Roseyards, Ballyeaston, and Lorne, and Isle Magee, with a ruling elder from each of the sessions, were erected into a synod, under the designation of the Associate Synod of Ireland. Their first meeting was appointed to be held at Belfast, on the first Tuesday of August, and Mr D. Arrot was appointed to preach on the occasion, and to constitute the Synod.

The first day of the meeting of each synod was to be observed as a synodical fast; and all the presbyteries were to meet in one General Associate Synod, at Edinburgh, on the last Wednesday of April in the following year. It was further resolved, that the first day of their meeting should be spent in fasting and in devotional exercises. The services of the forenoon were to be commenced with prayer, by Mr A. Bunyan, after which a discourse was to be delivered by the moderator; and the services of the afternoon were to be commenced with prayer, by Mr M'George, after which Mr Buist was to preach.

To prevent confusion in the conducting of business, and to mark out the proper order to be observed by the General Synod, as well as by the subordinate synods, in the determining of those causes that might come before them, the following regulations were adopted.

I. That the General Synod shall consist of all the ministers of the provincial synods and presbyteries subordinate to it, with one ruling elder to be chosen by their respective sessions; that an elder, who shall be admitted to a seat in it, shall bring with him a written attestation, subscribed by the moderator or clerk, bearing that he is an elder, in the full exercise of his office, and that he was chosen in a meeting of session, to which members were duly called; but, if disputed, it shall be referred to a committee.

II. That the quorum of the General Synod shall be sixteen, of whom there shall be at least twelve ministers;

which number being met, they shall be competent to proceed to business.

III. That the Synod shall be employed in prayer, during a part of one day, at each of their meetings.

IV. That the General Synod shall have the business that properly belongs to the supreme court; that is, all causes brought by appeal or reference, for being decided by a court of the last resort; all acts respecting the Secession in general; acts as to the public profession and testimony made by the Synod; acts appointing the questions to be put to ministers and elders, at their ordination, or to preachers at receiving licence; terms of ministerial and christian communion; the erection of synods or presbyteries; the disjoining of presbyteries from synods; the enacting of rules for the proceedings of the inferior courts, and whatever is competent and proper for the Synod, as having the inspection of the whole Secession Church; but that the General Synod shall not disjoin a presbytery from one synod, and annex it to another, at the meeting at which this is first proposed, but shall delay it to their following meeting, unless the consent of both synods and presbyteries concerned be duly notified to the General Synod.

V. That the General Synod shall (as the Associate Synod hitherto have done), continue to direct as to the admission of young men to the study of divinity; the appointing of students of divinity for trials, in order to their preaching the gospel in the different presbyteries; the appointing of foreign missions; and the appointing of preachers to the several synods or presbyteries; and that they shall retain the inspection and management of their public fund, and of the fund for the widows and children of ministers throughout Britain, in indigent circumstances; but that the Synod of Ireland shall have their widows' fund under their own inspection. The General Synod to have committees, as usual, in the Associate Synod, or such other committees as they shall appoint, with power, after any matter has been heard before a committee, to sub-commit for facilitating business.

VI. That the moderator may call a meeting *pro re nata*,

if the General Synod shall, on some supposed probable necessity, recommend such a meeting to be called, with advice of some brethren or presbyteries ; or, if some business of any great importance occur in the intervals of the meetings of the General Synod, he may call one at the desire, or with the concurrence of two provincial synods, or with the advice and concurrence of one-third of the presbyteries, if the provincial synods have not their meetings at the time, such business shall be made known to him ; that the calling of meetings *pro re nata* be forty days preceding the meeting, by letters subscribed by the moderator, and regularly sent to every minister.

VII. That no appeal shall be received from a presbytery to the General Synod, in the way of passing over the synod of their bounds, unless the appeal has been made since their synod had a meeting, and at least twenty days have elapsed from the making of their appeal to the meeting of the General Synod.

VIII. That the synod books shall be regularly brought up by rotation to the General Synod, from one or two synods, as the General Synod shall find the revisal of them to be practicable.

IX. That each provincial synod shall be furnished with a copy of the minutes of the General Synod, to be kept by them *in retentis*.

The following were the regulations respecting provincial synods :—

I. That the business, which cannot be determined by a provincial synod, by reason of another provincial synod having interest therein, shall be referred to the General Synod, and the other synod duly informed of the reference.

II. That provincial synods may, if they see it necessary, disjoin congregations from one of their presbyteries and annex them to another ; but that they shall report their having done so to the first meeting of the General Synod for their review.

III. It is recommended to the several provincial synods,

that they appoint correspondents to each other, as often as the distance between the places of their meetings and the other work of ministers will admit; and especially when they apply to each other for such correspondence.

The following regulations were transmitted to presbyteries, to be observed by them in the meantime, so far as might be found for general edification: But they were to have them under their serious consideration, and to report their judgment concerning them, at the first meeting of the General Synod.

I. The provincial synods shall transmit, without delay, such preachers as have a call from any congregation within their bounds to the presbytery that has the inspection of that congregation.

II. The provincial synods and presbyteries shall exchange such preachers as have calls (or one of whom has a call) within other synods or presbyteries, that they may go to the presbyteries where the calls are come out; provided there are no competing calls for these preachers.

III. That it be recommended to presbyteries, who may be adjacent to one another to exchange, or give some days of preachers to each other; and that presbyteries who have many show this kindness to those who have fewer; so that there may be proper supply to vacancies and other places, and that preachers may have a proper course through vacancies.

IV. That when the members of any congregation, under the inspection of the General Synod, shall be declared by their presbytery able to support a settled ministry, they may apply to their own presbytery for a hearing of any preachers, that have been two months in the bounds of another presbytery; and having obtained the concurrence of their own presbytery, the other presbytery shall, on an application to them, send the preacher applied for, without delay, to preach at least two Sabbaths in that congregation; provided he has been two months in their own bounds, and not appointed on trials for ordination: And the presbytery that

has said congregation under their inspection, shall appoint one of their preachers to supply the place of the one that comes on such petition, if they have any preacher able to go on such a journey ; but if they have none able to go, or the distance be great, the presbytery that sends the preacher shall be preferable in the next appointments of the General Synod : But that in case of such a request being refused, though congregations may obtain hearings of preachers from their being detained by any presbytery contrary to this regulation ; yet such hearings shall not be reckoned lawful and regular in order to a call : Such exchange to be at the expense of the congregation that petitions.

V. This is only to be applied to congregations as above described, and not to new erections unable to support a fixed ministry : Complaints of a refusal to be allowed in ordinary course of appeals to provincial synods and to the General Synod.

After completing these arrangements, the Synod directed their attention to a variety of questions, in which the prosperity of religion, and the general interests of humanity, were deeply involved. That great and benevolent movement had already commenced in our country, which terminated in the final overthrow of that abominable traffic in human flesh, by which the annals of the civilized world had been so long degraded, viz. the slave-trade. The cries of the suffering sons of Africa, had reached the shores of Britain, and a band of philanthropists, moved with compassion on account of the innumerable wrongs inflicted on that injured race, and burning with shame on account of the dishonour which the toleration of such a traffic brought upon our own country, resolved on making the generous but bold attempt, to put an end to this infamous commerce, which was no less opposed to the claims of justice, than to the dictates of humanity, and which, for ages, had been the means of inflicting innumerable woes upon the human race. In this noble effort to break asunder the fetters of the slave, and to vindicate the insulted rights of humanity, the Secession Church

bore its share. It responded to the first call given to the friends of religion on this subject ; and, amid all the alternations of the protracted struggle, to which this humane attempt gave rise, it persevered, fighting side by side with the heroic and calumniated benefactors of the African, until the battle was ended, and the victory won.

On the 6th of May 1788, a motion was made that the Synod should give a public declaration of their sentiments on this subject. Some proposed that a petition should be presented to Parliament, in name of the Synod ; others were averse to this mode of procedure, and were of opinion, that, instead of petitioning, they should draw up a declaration of their sentiments, and publish it in several of the newspapers. This latter proposal was adopted ; and the following declaration was drawn up, and ordered to be published.

“ The Associate Synod, taking under consideration a proposal for petitioning Parliament on the subject of the slave-trade, though they do not judge it expedient, as a Synod, to appear in the character of petitioners, yet they are unanimous in expressing their hearty concurrence with their fellow subjects throughout the kingdom, who have declared their abhorrence of that infamous system, so inconsistent with religion and humanity, and their earnest wishes that measures may be speedily adopted for the effectual abolition of it. And they feelingly regret the wretched situation of that poor people who have so long suffered by it, not only on account of their being deprived of their natural liberties, but chiefly because of their being, for the most part, kept in ignorance of the saving doctrines and invaluable blessings of christianity ; and they especially wish that the present attention bestowed on that subject, and the exertions used for their emancipation from outward slavery, may be accompanied with no less zealous and vigorous efforts for promoting their spiritual and eternal welfare.”

A proposal was also made at this meeting to celebrate the centenary of the memorable Revolution, in 1688, by appointing a day of solemn thanksgiving. This proposal met

with some opposition ; and, after the Synod had agreed to adopt it, Messrs Russell, Cleland, Bruce, Thomson of Sanguhar, Stewart, Taylor, and Puller, craved to have it marked, that they were opposed to the motion. The following was the resolution which the Synod adopted :—

“ The Synod, taking into their serious consideration the wonderful deliverance wrought for these lands, at the Revolution, in the latter end of the year 1688, with the continuance thereupon of civil and religious liberty to us ever since that time, notwithstanding of different attempts to deprive us of it, they find that this calls loudly for gratitude and thanksgiving ; and they judge it necessary to commemorate in this manner, that, when our forefathers, in the period previous to the time referred to, were on the point of being swallowed up in the dreadful gulph of popery and tyranny, the Lord brought deliverance to us, in a very wonderful manner, and from a very unexpected quarter, by means of the Prince of Orange, afterwards King William III. They do not judge that the defects of the Revolution settlement, frequently testified against in former acts of this Synod, should abate our thankfulness for the great and invaluable blessings bestowed upon us in, and resulting from, that wonderful deliverance ; though our thankfulness ought to be accompanied with lamentation, because of the said defects, and our woful abuse of that signal interposition of Providence ; and therefore the Synod agree and appoint, that Wednesday, the 5th day of November this year, be observed in solemn thanksgiving and prayer, through all their congregations, with the vacant communities under their inspection ; and that this their act be duly intimated in their several congregations, on the Lord’s day immediately preceding, with suitable exhortations.”

When this act was published, it gave offence to some of the people, as well as the ministers ; and petitions were sent up, at next meeting, from the congregations of Mid-Calder and Whitburn, craving that the Synod would revise and explain it. The defects connected with the Revolution-set-

tlement were considered by the petitioners to be of such a serious nature as to require humiliation rather than thanksgiving; and the appointing of the 5th day of November, to be observed in this exercise, was viewed as giving countenance to the practice (which at that period was peculiarly obnoxious), of observing religious festivals or holidays.

With the view of vindicating themselves, and of removing all scruples from the minds of their people, as to the above appointment, the Synod drew up the following explanatory declaration, which appears to have given satisfaction to the complainants:—"Whereas various scruples have been entertained by some people and ministers of this Synod, concerning the act of May last year, appointing the 5th of November thereafter, to be observed in solemn thanksgiving, the Synod find themselves under a necessity, for their own vindication, and for the satisfaction of those people and members of Synod, to declare as follows: First, With respect to the matters of that act, that though it bears the title of an *Act for solemn thanksgiving*, yet in the body of the act it is expressed that our thankfulness ought to be accompanied with lamentation; and, though the grounds of humiliation and thanksgiving are not particularly enumerated, it was not intended by the Synod, in their passing of said act, to exclude any matters, whether of humiliation or thanksgiving, that had been specified as such in former acts of Synod. The Synod could not at that time overtake such a particular enumeration of either of those matters, as they could have wished. It was understood, and again and again declared to be understood and expected, that the several brethren of Synod, when they read said act from their pulpits, should make as particular and full enumeration of both these matters, either by reading papers prepared by them for the purpose, or by extempore speeches, as they choosed, according to all the extent of the testimony hitherto maintained by this Synod on these subjects. The Synod also take this occasion to declare that, under the *Mercies* referred to in the act complained of, they had in their eye the *peace and liberty*,

particularly in the enjoyment of their spiritual privileges, with which they have been favoured ever since the Revolution; and which is, in a great measure, owing to the deliverance then wrought for us by the hand of Providence; and considering that they have enjoyed such peace and liberty for so long a period, they judged that it might not be improper to observe a day of thanksgiving, with a special view to the deliverance wrought at the Revolution, and to the manifold mercies which have been the fruits of it, to the great and good things of the Lord's doing, amidst all the ill things done by us and our fathers.

“ Secondly, With reference to the day appointed to be observed in thanksgiving by the act complained of, the Synod take this occasion to assure their brethren and friends, that they fixed on the 5th of November for this purpose, without any manner of regard to that day more than to any other day of that year, or of any year since the period referred to in the act. They do, therefore, greatly mistake them, who suppose their appointment, in this single instance, was any symbolizing with the observation of what are called festivals or holidays of human invention. But people's minds being occasionally, without any instrumentality of the Synod, awakened to attend to the mercies of the Revolution-deliverance, they judged that it was so far a call in Providence to give them an opportunity to testify their thankfulness for these mercies, in a proper manner; and they were of this opinion, more especially, as it had been a complaint against the Synod, that the appointing of days of thanksgiving, on special occasions, had been hitherto much neglected by them.”



Not treated in RBSC

